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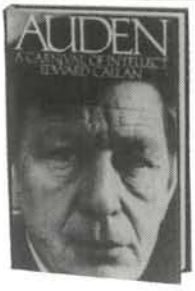

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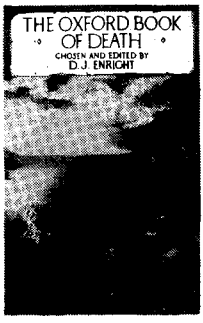

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35th Anniversary Issue

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To Our Readers

Publication of this 35th Anniversary Issue is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency, and by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. We wish to express our appreciation to these organizations, whose generosity has made this special issue possible.

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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

May I point out two small errors in James Finn Cotter's fine review (*The Hudson Review*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3, Autumn 1982) of my new book? First, *The Feel of the Sun* is my second book, not my first. (My first appeared in 1970 and was called *The Burning Field.*) Second, the Sung Dynasty poet Li Ching-chao was a woman, as is pointed out in the notes to the poem on the last page of the book.

Chicago MARK PERLBERG

Dear Editors,

In his review of *Water Music* (*The Hudson Review*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3, Autumn 1982), George Kearns erred in referring to the book as my second novel. *Water Music* is in fact a first novel. My first book, a collection of short stories called *Descent of Man*, was published in 1979 by Atlantic-Little, Brown.

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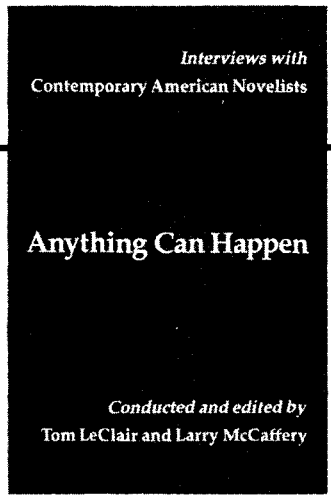

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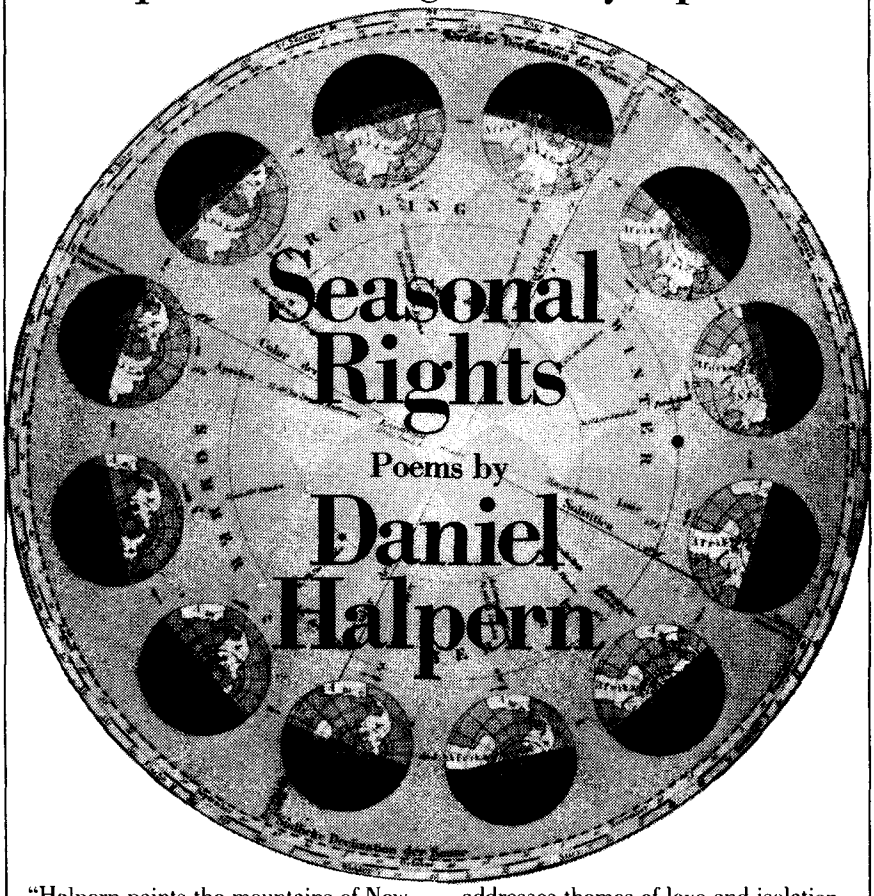

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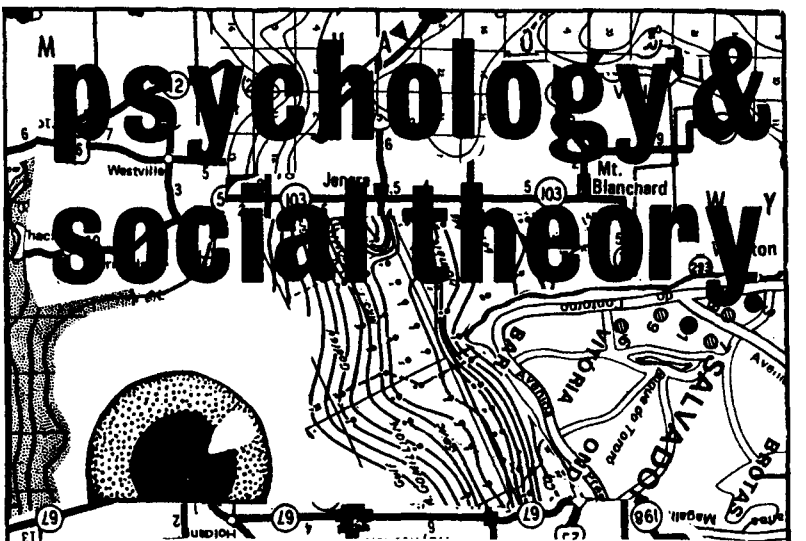

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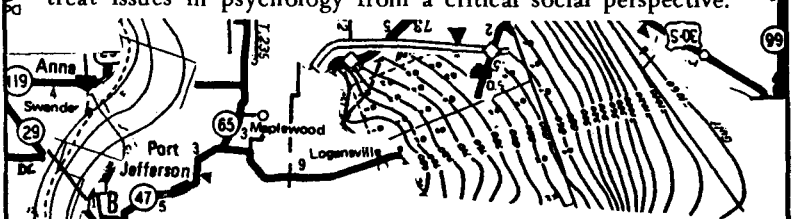

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LOUIS RENE BERES

Embracing Omnicide: President Reagan and the Strategic Mythmakers

In the Greek myth, the gods had condemned Sisyphus to the perpetual torment of hopeless labor. Again and again, after rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, Sisyphus was forced to watch the stone fall back of its own weight. In the fashion of Sisyphus, the United States now labors for national security by wedding its nuclear strategy to an incomprehensibly futile set of policies. These policies endorse a provocative "counterforce syndrome" that links successful deterrence to expanded preparations for fighting a nuclear war. Coupled with preparations to "prevail" in a "protracted" and/or "limited" nuclear war, this strategy of "escalation dominance" actually makes nuclear war much more likely.

Happily, those who are responsible for this situation—President Reagan and the strategic mythmakers of his administration—are being challenged by a growing popular movement against nuclear weapons and nuclear war. Avoiding nuclear war, once merely a marginal tic of consciousness, is now a swollen, irreversible imperative. Spurred on by the administration's refusal to reject the right to "first use" of nuclear weapons (a rejection that would parallel the recent Soviet declaration before the U.N. General Assembly's Second Special Session on Disarmament) and by its corollary disregard for a genuine nuclear "freeze," legions of Americans have begun to confront the strategic mythmakers with a full exposure of their falsehoods and uninformed conjectures. In so doing, they have acted upon the understanding that the current nuclear debate concerns nothing less than the fundamental arrangements of human survival and that these arrangements demand a reasoned sensitivity to the true implications of a nuclear war. And since the stockpiled nuclear weapons that exist today can kill all life on earth in a way that would make

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impossible any further reproduction of living cells, these implications include nothing less than "omnicide." According to the distinguished philosopher, John Somerville:

> The nuclear weapon can thus destroy not only all of nature, but even the natural relation of death to life, for what we have always previously known as death is of course the recycling and recombining of cells capable of carrying on life in other forms. Killing the cell itself thus kills not only life but life-giving death. This means that nuclear death is *qualitatively* worse than normal death, and that nuclear war is qualitatively worse than previous war, and should therefore have a new name which more precisely connotes the new thing. That is why I proposed "omnicide."[1]

It follows from Somerville's discussion that nuclear killing is effectively worse than death and that even nuclear conflict transcends the ordinary meaning of war. Therefore we must now direct special attention to the function of language, since the euphemisms of the nuclear age may etherize an unwitting humanity into accepting the unacceptable. Such euphemisms as "crisis relocation," "limited nuclear war," "protracted nuclear war," "collateral damage," "countervalue" and "counterforce" strategies and "enhanced radiation warfare" (the neutron bomb) are insidious to the cause of peace. In their substitutions of gibberish for truth, these expressions are intended to make the currency of nuclear war-fighting valid coin.

The essence of the Reagan administration's strategic universe is a vast intellectual and ethical emptiness. A petrified world-view that ignores the requirements of preventive eschatology, it offers its assertions with immense clamor and with brazen disregard for what is known. Behind its sound and fury, however, there is nothing.

To meet its deterrence objectives, the United States needs to ensure that its strategic forces are sufficiently invulnerable and penetration-capable to be certain of destroying the Soviet Union after riding out a first-strike attack. This country does

[1] See John Somerville, "Philosophy of Peace Today: Preventive Eschatology," Wallach Award Essay 1981, *Peace Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2., April 1980, p. 63.

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not need to take steps (as are currently being taken) to threaten the "other side's" retaliatory forces in a manner that is needlessly provocative. Almost all of the Reagan administration's current strategic and theatre force expansions will have the effect of *undermining* this country's deterrence posture and security, since they will add nothing to our invulnerability/penetration capability requirements, while they *will* heighten Soviet incentives to strike first.

Curiously, nothing in current American nuclear strategy suggests a plausible relationship between nuclear war and politics. Why, exactly, are the Soviets believed to be getting ready to "fight and win" a nuclear war with the United States? What conceivable postwar prospect can be associated with alleged Soviet plans for a first strike against the United States? Why should the Soviets be expected to disregard Clausewitz' dictum that war should always be conducted with a view to sustaining an overriding "political object"? The dangers of assessing Soviet nuclear intentions in a vacuum are substantial. By assuming that their *Staatspolitik* offers no homage to reasonable relationships between nuclear war and national political goals, the strategic mythmakers create a bewildering expectation of first-strike scenarios that in turn produces a staggering array of provocative tactics and deployments. The net effect of such "thinking" is an enlarged prospect of escalation and collision.

The reasonableness of a second-strike counterforce strategy (i.e., the Reagan nuclear strategy) is based on the expectation that a Soviet first strike would be limited. This is the case because if the Soviet first strike were unlimited, this country's retaliation would hit only empty silos. Yet, there is no reason why the Soviets would ever choose to launch a limited first strike against the United States. In response, of course, the strategic mythmakers argue that the Soviets have a refiring and reconstitution capability with their missiles and that even an unlimited first strike would take place in several successive stages. Hence, American counterforce-targeted warheads, used in retaliation, would not necessarily hit only empty silos. They would also hit silos that might otherwise spawn weapons to enlarge the damage of the Soviet first strike.

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But this argument is oriented entirely to issues of the actual *fighting* of a nuclear war. Accepting the likely prospect of a nuclear war and the probable failure of nuclear deterrence, it concerns itself (in conjunction with plans for multilayer ballistic missile defense, air defense and civil defense) only with *intra-war* damage limitation. Yet, there would be very little left of the United States to protect after the first round of Soviet attacks had been absorbed (we must remember, in this connection, that we don't even target Soviet submarine-based nuclear weapons, SLBMs). And the "countervailing" strategy makes such attacks more likely in the first place by undermining stable deterrence (i.e., by signaling U.S. first-strike intentions). Looked at in cost-benefit terms, therefore, it is clear that the alleged damage-limitation benefits that would accrue to the United States from its countervailing strategy during a nuclear war are greatly outweighed by that strategy's deterrence-undermining costs.

II

What, then, accounts for the strategic mythmakers and their steady tilt toward *thanatos*?

How can it be that the United States, now thoroughly dominated by what Mumford calls the military "megamachine," is so oblivious to its increasingly limited chances for survival?

How is it that at a time when humankind can almost surely be counted upon to ensure the triumph of oblivion (the prototype of all injustice), President Reagan and the strategic mythmakers are so incapable of understanding what is happening?

How is it that at a time when humankind must decide whether it wishes to survive as a species or whether, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea, it will be erased, the United States can only offer a strategy that caricatures prudent mental activity?

How can we pass beyond the current untenable position to a more promising plane of international understanding when this position is the antithesis of genuine thought—i.e., an in-

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sipid nuclear theology that presents clichés and stock phrases that only serve to close the eyes of the mind?

How can the propagation of strategic myths take place amidst the parallel popularization of medical and scientific critiques?[2]

At a time when authoritative assessments of the expected consequences of nuclear war point fixedly toward oblivion, how can our leaders promise normalcy in the post-apocalypse world (normalcy that would go so far as to include emergency change-of-address cards for use after the smoke has cleared)? Many of us have laughed at the satirical quality of current American strategic plans, especially those plans that concern "relocation" of urban populations and the secure transport of sanitary napkins and credit cards to "host areas." But these plans are offered without satirical intent. How can this be?

Several answers come slowly to mind. Sadly, none of them is particularly heartening.

One answer is simply *opportunism*. The manufacture of strategic myth in the Reagan Era is a growth industry. Throughout the corridors of selected "think tanks," Babbit-caricatures-turned-scholars have discovered that there is both fame and fortune in the encouragement of facile nuclear machismo. It is a small matter that their recommendations are *wrong*. They sell!

A second answer is *thoughtlessness*. By this I mean not the ordinary sense of the word, i.e., a lack of caring, but rather the meaning given by the distinguished political philosopher, Hannah Arendt: that is, the literal inability to think.

Wherever one turns today in the Reagan administration, one encounters a marked incapacity to deal with a complex reality. Awash in gobbledygook, the administration seeks, by vast rhythmic repetition, to make nonsense sensible. Instead, it is only making thinking impossible. Thought is synonymous

[2] For such critiques, see, for example: National Academy of Sciences, *Long-Term Worldwide Effects of Multiple Nuclear Weapons Detonations*, Washington, D.C., 1975, 212 pp; Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress, *The Effects of Nuclear War*, Washington, D.C., May 1979, 151 pp; and Ruth Adams and Susan Cullen, eds., *The Final Epidemic: Physicians and Scientists on Nuclear War* (Chicago: Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science, 1981).

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with imagination, but the strategic mythmakers of the Reagan administration are prisoners of a subculture that can only use and reuse the same fixed categories of expression. Having regressed to systems of prelogical reasoning, the mythmakers offer a strategic void in place of correct inference. Having reached the point where life and death, reality and imagination, fact and fantasy have ceased to be seen as contradictory, their thought is bereft of object. Thus turned inward upon itself, it represents not critical analysis but primal ritual.

A third answer is *psychopathology*. However disturbing to consider, it is altogether possible that the advancement of falsehoods in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence is a function of mental illness. Needless to say, this sort of answer is fraught with conceptual difficulties and practical problems of documentation, but it ought not to be dismissed out of hand. Depending upon his degree of affliction, the schizophrenic is one who has more or less cut off relations with the world outside. Withdrawn into a private world, his social and intellectual judgments are routinely uninformed by the "facts" of his surroundings. With such an understanding, it is difficult to rule out schizophrenia as an explanation for the behavior of the Reagan administration's strategic mythmakers.

As Erich Fromm has pointed out, schizophrenia is often linked to other types of psychotic processes.[3] In this connection, some of the strategic mythmakers may be true bureaucratic "necrophiles"—lovers of death whose sterile inclinations occasion them to salute nuclear war as liberation and to promote a final eschatological battle. Confronting the Apocalypse as healer, they urge us to prepare for omnicide "rationally."

Such prescriptions are, without question, founded upon the spirit of atrophy and decay. Of course, this spirit must be distinguished from the usual clinical picture of necrophilia (wherein death is associated with corpses), but it is undeniable that the persons involved may still be attracted by the pros-

[3] See Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1973), p. 393.

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pect of a world that is no more than the sum of lifeless artifacts, a surrealistic landscape of shorn bodies and imbecile imaginations. While the symbols of death have been transformed from objects of putrefaction to shiny engines of aluminum, steel and glass, it is still the world of "no-life" that animates the spirit of today's strategic mythmakers. For them, satisfaction may flow from the cult of anti-life, and "aliveness" may represent the very essence of anathema.

Yet, there is nothing about these inclinations toward *thanatos* that suggests deliberate *evil*. In contrast to Freud's view, which is focused very specifically on base motives, the explanation of strategic necrophilia may be entirely consistent with good intentions. Indeed, in considering these circumstances, one is reminded of the statement by Albert Camus: "It seems to me that every one should think this over. For what strikes me, in the midst of polemics, threats and outbursts of violence, is the fundamental good will of every one." It may even be that the strategic mythmakers are animated by an overriding wish to avoid evil, that their encouragement of policies that hasten nuclear war is the result of their commitment to all that is good in national and international affairs. As Ernest Becker points out in his book, *Escape From Evil*:

> Men cause evil by wanting heroically to triumph over it, because man is a frightened animal who tries to triumph, an animal who will not admit his own insignificance, that he cannot perpetuate himself and his group forever, that no one is invulnerable to try to demonstrate it.[4]

If we accept this view, that evil flows from the logic of the heroic, we must also accept that it is humankind's ingenuity rather than its animal nature that propels our journey to the ultimate misfortune. Tortured with insignificance by the knowledge of his own mortality and by the prospect of extinction, man seeks to transcend his unbearable fate through culturally standardized hero systems and symbols. Searching

[4] See Ernest Becker, *Escape From Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 151.

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for an heroic victory over death by trafficking in pure power, man must inevitably create evil—not in pursuit of debased ideals, but for the sake of purity, goodness and righteousness. Again, consider the words of Ernest Becker:

> Hitler Youth were recruited on the basis of idealism; the nice boy next door is the one who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima; the idealistic communist is the one who sided with Stalin against his former comrades: kill to protect the heroic revolution, to assure the victory over evil. As Dostoevsky saw, killing is sometimes distasteful, but the distaste is swallowed if it is necessary to true heroism. . . .[5]

It follows from all of this that there is a fourth explanation for the current conditions of strategic myth. This explanation, for lack of a better term, is human *ordinariness*. Understood in these terms, it is not mental illness, but "normal" human nature, that gives rise to strategic falsehoods.

Accepting the primacy of unfettered social Darwinism in a world that subordinates all concerns to the requirements of *Realpolitik*, the strategic mythmakers willingly place all human energies at the disposal of the military "megamachine." Observing such behavior, we may convincingly dispose of the idea that only psychopaths could be responsible for such defective reasoning about nuclear weapons and national security. And if we refuse to evade our most profound deficiencies by pushing them into the realm of mental illness, we invite ourselves to confront the most tragic aspect of current world politics: the "banality of evil."

The capacity to commit terrible deeds lies latent in all human beings. And this capacity, in an ironic kind of complementarity, is bound up very closely with our all-encompassing (if not always conscious) fear of death. In the words of Israel Charny, a psychologist whose brilliant new book seeks the human roots of a particular kind of crime against humanity, the crime of genocide:

> Much of our utterly depraved destructiveness may well have its roots in natural processes where we originally seek nothing more

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

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than to feel alive. Yet, because there is so much we do not know about how to manage the natural processes of life and its ever-present counterpart, death, many of us move ineluctably toward illness, insanity, and all manner of evil deeds, including the destruction of others.[6]

In these reflections, Charny recognizes that the human need for transcendence can be satisfied both by acts of creation and by acts of destruction. From this perspective, human nature is neither innately good nor evil, but in a continuous flux between the two poles. Thus, says Erich Fromm, "the ultimate choice for man, inasmuch as he is driven to transcend himself, is to create or to destroy, to love or to hate."[7]

There is, then, a *choice*. But it is usually limited by the demands of the omnivorous State. The result of such limitation, wherein the State subordinates all moral sensibilities to the idea of unencumbered jurisdiction, was foreseen in the 1930s by José Ortega y Gasset. In *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega correctly identifies the State as "the greatest danger," mustering its immense and unassailable resources "to crush beneath it any creative minority which disturbs it—disturbs it in any order of things: in politics, in ideas, in industry." Set in motion by individuals whom it has already rendered anonymous, the State establishes its machinery *above* society so that humankind comes to live *for* the State: "And as, after all, it is only a machine whose existence and maintenance depend on the vital supports around it, the State, after sucking out the very marrow of society, will be left bloodless, a skeleton, dead with that rusty death of machinery, more gruesome than the death of a living organism."[8]

The State flees reason because its leaders flee intimate awareness of Self, an awareness informed by the ever present potential for evil. In the end, therefore, it is from the lethal *synergy* of "normal" human qualities with the destructive

[6] See Israel Charny, *How Can We Commit the Unthinkable: Genocide, The Human Cancer* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1982), p. 45.
[7] See Erich Fromm, *On Disobedience* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), p. 4.
[8] See Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1932), p. 121.

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dynamics of *Realpolitik* that the strategic mythmakers draw their sustenance.

III

Nuclear strategy is a game that sane people may play, but not—as the strategic mythmakers suggest—with frivolity and without desperation. Moving about in a primeval world, one that has all of the earmarks of an archaic cosmology, the supporters of current strategy seem to have escaped not only the rules of thought but also the requirements of lucidity. Hypnotized by strangely uncompelling arguments, their entire process of forming, dissolving and reforming mental conjuncts stands as a challenge not only to rational thought and to competent intellectual activity but to life itself.

We see, therefore, that the propagation of strategic myth flows from some combination of self-centeredness, intellectual deficit, mental disturbance and "normal" human nature. Doesn't this mean that such propagation is vulnerable, that its crass exhibition of effrontery and incoherence can be countered with prudence and understanding? Regrettably, there appears to be no reason to believe that such optimism is warranted. In the dark but not too distant past, the melding of extreme social Darwinism with scientifically outrageous theories did not produce large-scale revulsion. Rather, it produced an enormously popular social movement, one founded on the presumed benefits of genocide. This does not suggest close comparability between Nazi Germany and the United States of the present day. But there are disturbing points in common insofar as public acceptance of a manifestly preposterous ideology is concerned.

The United States has been thinking against itself. To survive into the future, it will require leaders who can open their minds to ways of understanding not yet their own. Instead of advancing arguments that are nothing more than the product of artifice, mumbled again and again with the stereotyped monotony of schizophrenic incantations, these leaders will need to establish a clear perspective on our current policy

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failures. Only then can we hope to escape the predatory embrace of collective disintegration. A nuclear war cannot be considered a continuation of politics by other means. Even Clausewitz, championed by current *Realpolitikers* as a fountainhead of their strategic thought, would find any identification of nuclear war with rational policy to be abhorrent. As we have already seen, Clausewitz always cautioned that any use of force be considered with a view to its political object. Where force could only be injurious to that object, it would have to be rejected as a proper strategic option.

President Reagan and the strategic mythmakers have failed to learn the difference between power and violence. Yet, long before the Atomic Age, philosophers and military strategists probed this difference with sensitivity and prescience. Machiavelli, for example, recognized the principle of an "economy of violence"[9] that distinguishes between creativity and destruction: "For it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy."[10] With respect to war, Machiavelli counseled that even victory (the strategic mythmakers speak of the need "to prevail") need not be in the best interests of the prince, and that it might indeed produce an overall weakening of a State's position in world affairs.[11] More recently, Hannah Arendt has reflected on the distinction between violence and power, elucidating a situation wherein the technical development of the implements of violence has now outstripped any rational justifications for their use. Hence, war is no longer the *ultima ratio* in world politics, the merciless final arbiter in global disputes, but rather an apocalyptic chess game which neither contestant can win.[12]

Hannah Arendt's speculations on violence and power raise still another problem with the idea of planning to "prevail" in

[9] See the discussion of this principle in Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 195–238.

[10] See *Discourses*, I.

[11] See *Discourses*, II.

[12] See Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), p. 3. A similar argument is offered by Arthur Koestler in the Prologue to his *Janus: A Summing Up* (New York: Random House, 1978).

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a nuclear war. This is the problem of unpredictability characteristic of all violence. Contrary to the rarefied expectations of the strategic mythmakers, violence harbors within itself elements of arbitrariness and the unexpected:

> . . . nowhere does Fortuna, good or ill luck, play a more fateful role in human affairs than on the battlefield, and this intrusion of the utterly unexpected does not disappear when people call it a "random event" and find it scientifically suspect; nor can it be eliminated by simulations, scenarios, game theories and the like. There is no certainty in these matters, not even an ultimate certainty of mutual destruction under certain calculated circumstances. The very fact that those engaged in the perfection of the means of destruction have finally reached a level of technical development where their aim, namely warfare, is on the point of disappearing altogether by virtue of the means at its disposal is like an ironical reminder of this all-pervading unpredictability, which we encounter the moment we approach the realm of violence.[13]

In this connection, Arendt's concern for the uncertainties of violence has roots in Tolstoy's, Schopenhauer's and de Maistre's views on the chaos and uncontrollability of battles and wars, and stands in opposition to all those systematizers who deny the irregularity of combat. Resembling those modern historians who seek "laws" to explain and predict the vagaries of human behavior on a broad scale (e.g., Bossuet, Vico, Herder, Comte, Hegel, Buckle, Marx, Spengler, Toynbee and McNeill), the strategic mythmakers transform imperfect mosaics of military behavior into a structured "logic of events." Imprisoned by false assumptions and incorrect inferences, President Reagan and his strategic mythmakers display a marked failure to understand the nonrational springs of human action—springs that highlight the limits of game-theoretic systems of rational explanation.

To counter the strategic mythmakers, we would do well to reconsider Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. Here we would learn how little men are in control amidst the disorderly multitude of factors present in war. Here we

[13] See Arendt, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5.

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would learn what presumptuous hazards are associated with a strategy that seeks to impose order on what must always be chaos. Here we would encounter a memorable recitation of affairs in which the blind drives of honor and recklessness take precedence over considerations of safety and survival, a recitation that prefigures the consequences of excessive faith in rational models of nuclear warfare.

The wellsprings of strategic behavior always lie in the irrational and impulsive recesses of the human psyche. The conditions that arose in Classical Greece after the death of Pericles and the ascent of Cleon and Alcibiades in Athenian affairs have been repeated throughout human history. Understood in terms of the appraisals and prescriptions of the strategic mythmakers, these conditions point to an overweening pride and arrogance in counseling "rational" preparations for nuclear warfare.

In one of his stories, Jorge Luis Borges describes the calculations of a condemned man. Observing that expectations never seem to coincide with reality, this man ceaselessly imagines the circumstances of his own death. Since they have become expectations, he reasons, they can no longer take place. Borges' wisdom suggests that the United States must begin to move toward a sane paradigm of strategic thinking, one based upon a full awareness of the prospects for *omnicide*. Until we begin to picture ourselves within the arena of mortality, we will be unable to ensure our survival.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

The Previous Tenant

1

All that winter it snowed.
The sides of roads were heaped with it.
The nights were quiet. If you stepped outside,
above the dark woods and fields
hung glittering stars and constellations.

My landlord, Stanley, came by now and then
to see how things were going.
I reminded him that the previous tenant
had left boxes full of clothes,
a pair of skis, a rifle,
three shelves of books, and a fishing pole.

All right, he said, he'd get in touch with him.

I said, he must have left in a hurry.

A hurry? Stanley considered.
His eyes gleamed under bushy eyebrows.
Satanic. But I happened to know that Stanley
wouldn't hurt a fly. All that fall
I'd seen him trying to think of something
to persuade some raccoons to quit the premises—
everything short of a gun.

"McNeil was a bit disorganized,"
he said with a smile.

I asked if he'd like some coffee,
and he said yes. While I was making it
he talked about the previous tenant.

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2

A doctor named Hugh McNeil
came on the staff at Mercy Hospital
and bought a house in Point Mercy.

Hugh and Nancy fitted right in . . .
people liked them.
Helen Knox, whose husband was vice-president
of the National Maritime Bank,
called on Nancy and invited her
to join the Garden Club.
Then they were asked to join the Golf Club.
(The Levines, on the other hand, hadn't been invited.
After two years of Point Mercy
they sold their house and moved back to Queens.)

The McNeils had children: Tom, fourteen,
and Laurie, nine and a half, nearly ten.
McNeil was one of the fathers on Saturday
dashing about. He drove a green Land Rover
as though he were always on safari
with the children and an Irish setter.

Nancy was nice . . . blonde,
and intelligent—she'd been to Wellesley.
She took on the job of secretary
of the Garden Club, that nobody wanted,
and helped organize the dance at the Yacht Club
on July the Fourth, for Hugh had joined that too.
He bought a "Cal" Thirty Martini-rigged sloop,
and with Tom as crew went sailing.
They came in fifth in the Martha Woodbury
Perpetual Trophy.

Nancy didn't sail,
it made her seasick. She sat on the patio
with her knitting till the boats hove in sight,
then went down to the basin.

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McNeil spoke at village meetings
with moderation and common sense.
Once he argued for retaining
the Latin teacher at the high school.
Latin, he explained, was still useful
for medicine and law, and a foundation
for good English. They heard him out
and voted to let the Latin teacher go
and remodel the gymnasium.
McNeil accepted defeat gracefully.
That was one of the things they liked about him.

The residents of Point Mercy
are proud of their village
with its beautiful homes and gardens
and bird sanctuary.
Contrary to what people say
about the suburbs, they appreciate culture.
Hugh McNeil was an example . . .
doing the shopping, going to the club,
a man in no way different from themselves,
husband and family man
and good neighbor, who nevertheless spoke Latin.

3

Her name was Irene Davis.
Before she married it was Cristiano.
"I met her once," said Helen Knox.
"Harry introduced her to me
at the bank. A dark woman . . .
I think, a touch of the tar brush."

There is no accounting for tastes
observed Sandie Bishop.

The woman's husband was an invalid
and patient of Dr. McNeil.
The green Land Rover had been seen
parked outside the Davises' house

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in the afternoon, in the evening,
and once—this was hilarious—the doctor
ran out of gas in that part of town
at three in the morning. He didn't have cash
or credit cards on him, and had to walk
to the nearest open service station.
The attendant let him have a gallon.
"I've been in the same fix," he told McNeil,
"you can pay me some other time."

The attendant talked, and the story
got back to Point Mercy.
"It's a scandal," said Sandie.
"Do you think Nancy knows?"

Helen said, "I'm sure she does."

"Someone should have a talk with him,"
Sandie said. She remembered
with some excitement, the occasion
when a resident of Point Mercy
had been thinking of selling his house
to a family that was black.
Every morning he would find garbage
dumped on his lawn. The prospective buyer
received an anonymous letter,
and that was the end of that.

"Let's not be hasty," said Helen
who was president of the Garden Club
and had more experience.
"These things have a way of working themselves out."

4

One day there was a sensation:
Dr. McNeil had been mugged,
beaten and left by the road.

"Mugged?" said the service station attendant.
This was long after the event.

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He looked around, but there was no one
in hearing distance, only the dog,
a hound that wandered around
with an infected ear, snapping at flies.
All at once it perked up its ears
and went running. It must have smelled something
mixed with the odor of gasoline
and dust . . . a delirious
fragrance of sensual life.

The attendant leaned closer
and said in a conspiratorial voice,
"He was never mugged.
It was Irene Davis's brothers,
the Cristianos. They had him beat up."

He knew about gangsters. They would beat up a guy
to warn him. The next time it was curtains.

5

So McNeil was in the hospital
with two broken ribs, black eyes,
and a missing tooth.

At the next meeting of the Garden Club
the president said she was as broad-minded
as anyone, but this . . .
here she paused as though it were beneath her
to find words for such low behavior . . .
had brought violence into their midst.

Sandie moved they send a delegation
to the hospital, to demand McNeil's
immediate resignation.

The next day four of the members
called on Dr. Abrahams, chief of staff,
and told him what they wanted.
A short man, with hair on his face,
all the time they were talking he kept turning

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from one to the other, and grinning,
like some sort of monkey, Sandie said afterwards.

He thanked them for their concern.
But McNeil's private life—
not that he knew anything about it—
had nothing to do with his work
or his position here at the hospital.
If they would take his advice
they would be careful what they said—
they might find themselves charged
with libel. Speaking, he was sure,
for the entire staff, they were fortunate
to have a surgeon of Hugh McNeil's caliber.

Could he be of service in anything else?
No? Then would they please excuse him . . .
it looked like a busy day.

They were halfway to the parking lot.
"What can you expect?" said Helen.
"It was bad enough letting them in,
but to make one chief of staff!"

She knew how to put what they were feeling
into words. This was why
she was president—elected not once
or twice . . . this was her third term in office.

6

Then Nancy sued for divorce.
She had all the evidence she needed:
her husband had been with Irene Davis
in Providence, Rhode Island,
when he was supposed to be in Boston
attending a medical conference.

This was when he moved into the cottage.
It consisted of a small bedroom,
living room, bathroom, kitchen.

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Thoreau, who recommends sleeping in the box
railroad workers keep their tools in,
would have found this house commodious.

I could imagine him coming home . . .
putting some fries on a metal sheet
and sliding it into the oven
set at 350 degrees.
Sprinkling a couple of chops
with pepper and garlic.
Deciding which frozen vegetable . . .
say, spinach. Putting the block
in a saucer with water and salt.
Making a salad . . . but this would mean
slicing tomatoes, radishes, scallions,
and washing lettuce. There would be times
when he just couldn't be bothered.

He would have a drink, then a second.
You have to be careful not to make it three
and four. On the other hand
you shouldn't be too careful,
or like Robinson Crusoe you may find yourself
taking pride in the neatness and efficiency
of your domestic arrangements:
all your bowls made out of gourds
lined up on a shelf according to size.
Ditto your spoons.
"A place for everything," you say to the parrot,
"and everything in its place."

Bake the French fries,
boil the frozen vegetable, broil the lamb chops.
You can prepare a nourishing dinner
in twenty minutes, and eat it in five
while reading the *Times* or watching *Charlie's Angels.*

He would watch TV again after dinner.
My God, he'd say to the walls,
it can't be this bad. But it was.

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He'd turn it off and pick up a book.
Now that he had plenty of time
he could catch up on the ones he'd missed
when they came out: titles like *Future Shock*
and *The Greening of America.*

Then he was on an express train
racing to the end of the line,
a flash and a moment of excruciating
pain. He was paralyzed,
helpless to move a leg or an arm.

And woke, having fallen asleep
in his chair, to hear the dripping
of snow melting on the roof.

On nights when he couldn't sleep
he'd watch the late late show.
In the dark night of the soul,
says F. Scott Fitzgerald,
it is always three in the morning.
Hemingway says, it isn't so bad . . .
in fact, the best hour of the night
once you've reconciled yourself to insomnia
and stopped worrying about your sins.
And I say that insomnia can be
a positive joy if you're tuned in to *Dames*
or *Gold Diggers of 1933.*
I remember seeing *The Producers*
at three in the morning, and practically
falling out of bed. There are pleasures
known to none but late late movie-goers,
moments of the purest absurdity,
such as, in an otherwise boring movie
starring the Marx Brothers, the "Tenement Symphony"
as sung by Tony Martin.

So there he was, watching Busby Berkeley's
electrically lighted waterfalls,
and the Warner Brothers cuties

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viewed from underneath, treading water.

"Ain't we got fun!" shrieked the parrot,
and the goat gave a great bound.

7

Behind the Perry Masons and Agatha Christies
I came across a packet of letters.
It was like being a detective.

When Irene's husband came home
from the hospital, he was confined
to his bed, by doctor's orders.
And McNeil was the doctor.
"Call me at home," said Irene.
"There is no problem about telephone calls."

I copied some of the passages.
They might come in useful. There was an idea for a novel
I'd had for years: *A Bovary of the Sierras . . .*
The Bovary of Evanston . . . The Bovary of Green Harbor.

There was a paragraph about some flowers
and his cock that might have been conceived
by the author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover.*
It went to show that when an idea
has genuine merit, individuals
far removed in space and time
come upon it independently.

She even knew her Bible:
"When my beloved slipped his hand through the latch-hole
my bowels stirred within me."

Rumor was right. It was her brothers
who had McNeil beaten up.
She told him that he wasn't to see her
ever again. She feared for his life.
"Irene . . . signing off."

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But she didn't sign off. Here she was again.
"If you have a new woman in your life
or you've gone back to your wife
I don't want to muck things up.
This is just a peacepipe, kid—
send me a smoke signal
if I'm getting in the way of anything.
Cheerio, Irene."

Then they picked up again where they'd left off.

They had been with each other
yesterday. She could still feel him inside her.

I was beginning to be afraid
for him. For her. For both of them.

8

Stanley telephoned to say that McNeil
was coming to pick up his things.

I put the books in cartons,
and piled the cartons and the rest of his things
next to the door: the boxes of clothes,
the skis, the fishing pole,
and the rifle—I was loath to part with it,
the way America was greening.

The next day my predecessor
arrived. A man of forty
with red hair . . . looking slightly angry.
Suspicious. I couldn't put my finger on it.

He was accompanied by a young woman
wearing jeans and a sweater.
She was fair, and had a friendly smile.
"It was good of you to take care
of Hugh's things," she said. "Wasn't it, Hugh?"
"O yes," he said. "Thanks."

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I helped them carry things out
to the station wagon. It was snowing again . . .
not flakes, but particles, coming down fast
at an angle, like rain or hail.

They drove away.
She waved. He looked straight ahead.
It appeared he was back on the track
once more, after his derailment.
With a woman of the right kind at his side
to give him a nudge. "Say thanks!"

9

It is always that famous day and year
at the Colony Inn . . . a brick fireplace,
rough-hewn beams, and pewter candlesticks.
From the ceiling hang the flags
of the thirteen original colonies.

The waitresses wear bonnets and muslin gowns
that hang straight from the shoulder
to the floor, leaving their arms and elbows
exposed. Some of the older waitresses
seem to resent being made to dress
like children. Their movements are slow.

One of them arrived finally
to take our order, and departed
moving with slow steps
as befitted an early American.

Maggie said, "Don't look now!
By the window . . . that's Irene Davis,
the woman McNeil had the affair with."

I looked around the room casually
and let my gaze come to rest
on Irene.

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They said she was dark. What they hadn't said
was that the darkness, jet-black hair,
was set off by a skin like snow,
like moonlight in a dark field glimmering.
Her features were . . . fine. She wouldn't have been
out of place in an Italian villa
with walls five feet thick, and chickens
roosting on the furniture . . . the family
crowded into three rooms upstairs . . .
a *contessa*, married to the invalid son
of impoverished aristocracy.

I wondered what she would have thought
if she'd known I'd read her letters.

There were two people with her:
an old woman with white hair
who looked as though she'd just got off
the boat from Palermo . . .
and a man, he must be Irene's brother . . .
the same black hair and white complexion.
But what in her looked romantic,
in him spelled murder. He was thin
and sinewy . . . wearing a green jacket,
dark green shirt, white tie.

I imagined he was being tolerant
of the restaurant . . . these assholes
with their consommés and casseroles,
their salads consisting of lettuce
and cottage cheese . . . And what was this
for chrissake? Sweet potato
with marshmallow on top . . . you call this food?

But he was on his best behavior.
He didn't pull an automatic
and blow holes through the flags
of the thirteen original colonies.

Irene must have felt me staring.

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She turned . . . her eyes met mine
for a few seconds. I had an impression
of . . . defiance. "What do you want?"

I quickly looked away.

10

Maggie was meeting a friend
at three. It was now two-thirty.

So we walked around Island Bay.
The village has been reconstructed
to preserve a Colonial atmosphere.
At the crest of a slope facing the bay
stands the post office. This at least
is authentic. It has four columns,
white of course, and a big golden eagle
above the entrance. On either side
in a crescent, there are shops
with signs lettered in gold:
Optometrist, Pharmacy, Antiques . . .
There's a shop selling Irish linen
and wool. Another selling jewelry
and notions . . . Royal Doulton . . .
little statues of Colonial women
in hoopskirts and wigs,
and the figure of a young girl
in shorts, taking a swing at a golf ball.

The slope goes down to a road.
Between this and the bay
stands a gazebo, an open dome
housing a bust of Hercules.
This, they say, was a ship's figurehead.
All but the bearded head
is a reconstruction . . . some local artist
has added a muscular torso
and draped over one shoulder

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the skin of the Nemean lion.
A sillier, more pathetic monster
it would be hard to imagine,
with his doggy nose and wide-open eyes
that seem to say, Look at me.
I never did any harm.

This monument to our culture,
believe it or not, had been vandalized . . .
battered and gashed.
Whoever did it must have used a hammer
or an axe.

I said, "Boys will be boys."

"I'm sure," Maggie said, "it wasn't anyone
from around here."

I wasn't so sure. Our high schools
every year turn out their quota of vandals
and thieves. Not to mention illiterates.
You don't have to go into New York City . . .

How, she said, could I be so cynical?

I said, why was it
that when you told the truth
people accused you of being cynical?

We were on our way to having a quarrel.
I didn't want to. I liked Maggie,
with her quizzical way of looking at me,
her air of calm, unclouded judgment,
her mouth that turned down at one corner
when she smiled.

But now she wasn't smiling.
She said, "It's your attitude.
Like what you said in the restaurant

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about Hugh McNeil and the Davis woman
being better than the rest of us."

She had her back to the post office.
The wings of the golden eagle
seemed to spring out of her shoulders.
I was filled with a sense of the ridiculous.

She sensed it, and became really angry.
"I know, you prefer vulgar people.
Anyone who tries to be decent and respectable
is either a hypocrite or a fool."

So we had our quarrel.
Then a car drove up and stopped.
It was Helen Knox. She leaned over
and opened the door for Maggie.

"Good afternoon," she said to me,
very cool. I knew what she thought of me
and my writing. A friend told me—
for writers have such friends.

She said, "I thought I ought to read
one of his novels. But I couldn't bring myself
to finish it. Why write about
such ordinary things?

What with chauffeuring the children
and entertaining Harry's friends,
if I find time to read, it has to be something
that takes me out of myself.

You have to be selective—
this is why I read the *New Yorker*, and *Time*,
and subscribe to the Book of the Month."

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GUY DAVENPORT

Fifty-Seven Views of Fujiyama

MONTHS, DAYS, ETERNITY'S SOJOURNERS. Years that unfold from the cherry in flower to rice thick in the flat fields to the gingko suddenly gold the first day of frost to the red fox across the snow. The sampan pilot from Shiogama to Ishinomaki, the postman galloping from Kyoto to Ogaki, what do they travel but time? Our great journey is through the years, even when we doze by the brazier. Clouds move on the winds. We long to travel with them. For I, Basho, am a traveler. No sooner, last autumn, did I get home from a fine journey along the coast, take the broom to the cobwebs in my neglected house on the Sumida River, see the New Year in, watch the wolves slinking down from the hills shoulder deep in white drifts, look in wonder all over again, as every spring, at the mist on the marshes, than I was ready to set out through the gate at Shirakawa. I stitched up the slits and rips in my trousers, hitched a new chin strap to my hat, rubbed my legs with burnt wormwood leaves, which puts vigor into the muscles, and thought all the while of the moon rising full over Matsushima, what a sight that would be when I got there and could gaze on it.

We set out, she and I, a fine late summer day, happy in the heft and chink of our gear. We had provender for a fortnight in the wilderness along the Vermont Trail, which we took up on a path through an orchard abandoned years ago, where in generous morning light busy with cabbage butterflies and the green blink of grasshoppers an old pear tree still as frisky and crisp as a girl stood with authority among dark unpruned winesaps gone wild, and prodigal sprawling zinnias, sweetpeas, and hollyhocks that had once been some honest farmwife's flowers and garden grown from seeds that came in Shaker packets from upstate New York or even Ohio, now

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blooming tall and profuse in sedge and thistle all the way to the tamaracks of the forest edge, all in that elective concert by which the lion's fellowship makes the mimosa spread. This trail was blazed back in the century's teens by a knickerbockered and tweed-capped comitatus from Yale, carrying on a tradition from Raphael Pumpelly and Percy Wallace and Steele MacKaye, from Thoreau and Burroughs: a journey with no purpose but to be in the wilderness, to be in its silence, to be together deep among its trees and valleys and heights.

Having, with great luck, sold my house by the river, thereby casting myself adrift, so to speak, from obligations and responsibilities, I moved in for a while with my friend and patron, the merchant Sampu, himself a poet. *Bright flash makes me blink: spring field, farmer's spade.* But before I went I brushed a poem for my old doorpost. *Others now will sing high in peach blossom time behind this door wild grass blocks.* And at dawn I set out, more of night still in the sky than day, as much by moonlight fading as by sunlight arriving, the twenty-seventh of March. I could just make out the dim outline of Fuji and the thin white cherry blossoms of Ueno and Yanaka. Farewell, Fuji! Farewell, cherry blossoms! Friends had got up early to see me off, indeed to go with me for the first leg of the journey by boat, as far as Senju. It was not until they left me that I felt, with a jump of my heart, the three hundred miles I was proposing to go. Water stood in my eyes. I looked at my friends and the neat clusters of houses at Senju as if through rain. *Fish and bird regret that springtime is so brief.* This was my parting poem. My friends took copies, and watched till I was out of sight.

On the beach at Sounion. Tar and seaweed shift in the spent collapse and slide of shirred green water just beyond our toes. We had been to see Byron's name carved with a penknife on a column of Poseidon's temple. Homer mentions this cape in the Iliad, perhaps all of Attika that he knew. It was here that the redstone *kouros* was excavated who stands in Athens by the javelin-hurling Zeus. We lie in Greek light. The silence is musical: the restlessness of the Ionian, the click

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of pebbles pushed by the seawash. There is no other sound. *I am Hermes. I stand by the grey sea-shingle and wait in the windy wood where three roads meet.* A poem? From the *Anthology*. Wet eyelashes, lens of water in navel. Another. *To Priapos, god of gardens and friend to travelers, Damon the farmer laid on this altar, with a prayer that his trees and body be hale of limb for yet a while, a pomegranate glossy bright, a skippet of figs dried in the sun, a cluster of grapes, half red, half green, a mellow quince, a walnut splitting from its husk, a cucumber wrapped in flowers and leaves, and a jar of olives golden ripe.*

All that March day I walked with a wondering sadness. I would see the north, but would I, at my age, ever return? My hair would grow whiter on the long journey. It was already Genroku, the second year thereof, and I would turn forty-five on the way. My shoulders were sore with my pack when I came to Soka, a village, at the end of the day. Travel light! I have always intended to, and my pack with its paper overcoat, cotton bath robe, neither of which were much in a heavy rain, my notebook, ink block, and brushes, would have been light enough except for gifts my friends loaded me with at parting, and my own unessential one thing and another which I cannot throw away because my heart is silly. We went, Sora and I, to see the sacred place of Muro-no-Yashima, Ko-no-Hana Sakuya Hime, the goddess of flowering trees. There is another shrine to her on the lower slopes of Fuji. When she was with child, Ninigi-no-Mikoto her husband would not believe that she was pregnant by a god. She locked herself into a room, set fire to it, and in the flames gave birth to Hoho-demi-no-Mikoto, the fire-born noble. Here poets write of the smoke, and the peasants do not eat a speckled fish called *kon-oshiro*.

We set out, she and I, like Basho on the narrow road to the deep north from his house on the Sumida where he could not stay for thinking of the road, of the red gate at Shirakawa, of the full moon over the islands of Matsushima, he and Kawai Sogoro in their paper coats, journey proud in *wabi zumai*, thinking of wasps in the cedar close of an inn, chrysanthemums touched by the first mountain frost. A few years

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before, Minoru Hara and I had climbed Chocorua to find a single lady slipper on a carpet of pine needles, to which he bowed, Chocorua that Ezra Pound remembered in the concentration camp at Pisa, fusing it with Tai Shan in his imagination, Chocorua where Jessie Whitehead lived with her pet porcupines and bear, Chocorua where William James died, Thoreau's Chocorua that he strolled up laughing that people used the word *climb* of its easy slopes. We set out into the deuteronomic mountains Charles Ives rings against *The Rock-strewn Hills Join in the People's Outdoor Meeting* with the chime of iron on iron, saber, bell, and hammer, bugle and mess kit, ramrod and spur, remembering how congenial and incantatory music led the caissons over the Potomac to Shiloh.

I spent the night of March thirtieth at Gozaemon the Honest's Inn at Nikko Mountain. Such was my landlord's name, which he made much of, assuring me that I would sleep out of harm's way on his grass pillows. When a stranger so advertises his honesty, you take more care than ever, but this innkeeper was as good as his name. There was no more guile in him than in Buddha the merciful, and Confucius would have approved of his scrupulousness and manners. Next day, April first, we climbed Nikko, Mountain of the Sun's Brilliance. The sainted Kobo Daishi named it and built the temple on it a thousand years ago. Its holiness is beyond words to describe. You can see its benevolence in every field round about. In it I wrote: *New leaves, with what holy wonder do I watch the sunlight on your green.* Through the mist we could just make out Mount Kurokami from the temple on Nikko. The snow on its slopes belies its name, Black-Haired Mountain. Sora wrote: *I arrived at Kurokami with my hair shorn, in new clean summer clothes.* Sora, whose name is Kawai Sogoro, used to chop wood and draw water for me. We were neighbors. I aroused his curiosity and made him a student of scenery. He too wanted to travel to see Matsushima in its beauty, and serene Kisagata.

Crickets creaking trills so loud we had to raise our voices, even on the beach down from the cycladic wall under the yellow spongy dry scrub with spiky stars of flowers. It is, he said, as if the light were noisy, all of it Heraclitus' little fine parti-

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cles cheeping away, madly counting each other. *Thotheka! entheka! thekaksi! ikosieksi! khilioi! Ena thio tris tessera!* Hair of the family of hay, torso of the family of dog, testicles of the family of Ionian pebbles, glans of the family plum. Give us another poem, here by the fountain-pen-blue-ink sea. *To Apollo of the Lykoreans Evnomos of Lokris gives this cricket of bronze. Know that, matched against Parthis in the finals for the harp, his strings rang keen under the pick until one of them snapped. But the prancing melody missed never a beat: a cricket sprang onto the harp and sounded the missing note in a perfection of harmony. For this sweet miracle, O godly son of Leto, Evnomos places this little singer on your altar.* From the *Anthology*. So it's Apollo and not Heraclitus running these nattering hoppergrasses and their katydid aunts and crickcrack uncles? And salty kneed old Poseidon singing along from the sea.

So Sora, to be worthy of the beauty of the world, shaved his head the day we departed, and donned a wandering priest's black robe, and took yet a third name, Sogo, which means Enlightened, for the road. When he wrote his haiku for Mount Kurokami, he was not merely describing his visit but dedicating himself to the sacredness of perception. We climbed higher above the shrine. We found the waterfall. It is a hundred feet high, splashing into a pool of darkest green. Urami-no-Taki is its name, See from Inside, for you can climb among the rocks and get in behind it. I wrote: *From a silent cave I saw the waterfall, summer's first grand sight for me.* I had a friend at Kurobane in Nasu County. To get there you cross a wide grassy moor for many's the mile, following a path. We kept our eyes on a village in the distance as a landmark, but night came on and rain began to pelt down before we could get there. We spent the night at a farmer's hut along the way. Next day we saw a farmer with a horse, which we asked the loan of. The paths over the moor, he said, are like a great net. You will soon get lost at the crossroads. But the horse will know the way. Let him decide which path to take.

These were the hills whose elegiac autumns Ives summons with bronze Brahms as a ground for Lee standing in his stirrups as he crossed the Mason and Dixon Line while a band of

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Moravian cornets alto, tenor, and baritone, an E-flat Helicon Bass Horn, drums battle and snare, strutted out the cake-walk dash of *Dixie*. The rebels danced in rank and gave a loud *huzzah*! These are the everlasting hills that stand from dawn time to red men to French hunter to Calvinist boot to rumors from farm to village that the bands played waltzes and polkas under the guns at Gettysburg when the cannonade was at its fiercest. We trod these hills because we loved them and because we loved each other, and because in them we might feel that consonance of hazard and intent which was the way Ives heard and Cézanne saw, the *moiré* of sound in the studio at West Redding where a Yale baseball cap sat on a bust of Wagner, the *moiré* of light in the quarries and pines at Bibémus. What tone of things might we not involve ourselves in the gathering of in these hills? With each step we left one world and walked into another.

I mounted the farmer's horse, Sora walked beside us. Two little children ran behind us. One was a girl named Kasane. Sora was delighted with her name, which means *many petalled*. He wrote: *Your name fits you, O Kasane, and fits the double carnation in its richness of petals!* When we reached the village, we sent the horse back by itself, with a tip knotted into the saddle sash. My friend the samurai Joboji Takakatsu, the steward of a lord, was surprised to see me, and we renewed our friendship and we could not have enough of each other's talk. Our happy conversations saw the sun across the country sky and wore the lantern dim way past moonrise. We walked in the outskirts of the town, saw an old academy for dog hunters—that cruel and unseemly sport was of short duration in ancient times—and paid our respects to the tomb of the lady Tamamo, a fox who took human shape. It was on this grave that the samurai archer Yoichi prayed before he shot a fan, at a great distance, from the mast of a drifting boat. Her grave is far out on the moor of grass, and is as lonely a place as you can imagine. The wind traveling through the grass! The silence! It was dark when we returned.

Leaves not opposite on a stem arrange themselves in two, five, eight, or thirteen rows. If the leaves in order of height

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up the stem be connected by a thread wound round the stem, then between any two successive leaves in a row the thread winds round the stem once if the leaves are in two or three rows, twice if in five rows, thrice if in eight, five if in thirteen. That is, two successive leaves on the stem will be at such a distance that if there are two rows, the second leaf will be halfway round the stem; if three rows, the second leaf will be one third of the way around; if five, the second will be two fifths of the way around; if eight, three eighths; if thirteen, five thirteenths. These are Fibonacci progressions in phyllotactic arrangement. The organic law of vegetable growth is the surd towards which the series one half, one third, two fifths, three eighths, and so on, approximates. Professor T. C. Hilgard sought for the germ of phyllotaxis in the numerical genesis of cells, the computation of which demonstrates Fibonacci progressions in time.

The tomb of En-no-Gyoja, founder of the Shugen sect, who nine hundred years ago used to preach everywhere in humble clogs, is in Komyoji Temple. My friend Joboji took me to visit it. In full summer, in the mountains, I bowed before the clogshod saint's tall image to be blessed in my travels. Unganji the Zen temple is nearby. Here the hermit Buccho, my old Zen master at Edo, lived out his life in solitude. I remember that he once wrote a poem in pine charcoal on a rock in front of his hut. *I would leave this little place, with its five feet of grass this way, five feet of grass that way, except that it keeps me dry when it rains.* We were joined by some young worshipers on the way. Their bright chatter made the climb seem no time at all. The temple is in a wood of cedars and pine, and the way there is narrow, mossy, and wet. There is a gate and a bridge. Though it was April, the air was very cold. Buccho's hut is behind the temple, a small box of a house under a big rock. I sensed the holiness of the place. I might have been at Yuan-miao's cave or Fa-yun's cliff. I made up this poem and left it there on a post: *Even the woodpeckers have not dared touch this little house.*

The first thing to go when you walk into the wilderness is time. You eat when you are hungry, rest when you are tired.

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You fill a moment to its brim. At a ford shoaling over rocks we doffed our packs, took off our boots and jeans, and waded in our shirt-tails for the childishness of it. Creek-washed feet, she said, as God intended. We dried in the sun on a boulder as warm as a dying stove, and fribbled and monkeyed with each other, priming for later. Jim Dandy! she said, and purred, but we geared up and pushed on, through Winslow Homer glades and dapple and tones that rose as if horn-heralded across sunny fields and greendark woods and tempers now lost except for the stubborn masks of their autochthony, Ives imitating a trumpet on the piano for Nikolai Slonimsky and hearing at Waterbury gavottes his father had played during the artillery barrage at Chancellorsville, Apollinaire hanging a N'tomo mask of the Bambara on his wall beside Picassos and Laurencins, Gaudier drawing Siberian wolves in the London Zoo, tempers with lost coordinates, for essences survive by chance allegiances and griefs: the harness chains on the caissons moving towards Seven Pines, dissonance and valence.

We ended our visit at Kurobane. I had asked of my host that he show me the way to Sessho-seki, the famous killing stone which slew birds and bugs that lit on it. He lent me a horse and guide. The guide shyly asked me, once we were out on the road, to compose a poem for him, and so delighted was I with the surprise of his request, that I wrote: *Let us leave the road and go across the moors, the better to hear that cuckoo.* The killing stone was no mystery. It is beside a hot spring that gives off a deadly gas. Around it the ground was covered with dead butterflies and bees. Then I found the very willow about which Saigyo wrote in his *Shin Kokin Shu*: *In the shade of this willow lying kindly on the grass and on the stream as clear as glass, we rest awhile on the way to the far north.* The willow is near the village Ashino, where I had been told I would find it, and we too, like Saigyo, rested in its shade. *Only when the girls nearby had finished planting rice in a square of their paddy did I leave the famous willow's shade.* Then, after many days of walking without seeing a soul, we reached the Shirakawa boundary gate, the true beginning of the road north. I felt a peace come over me, felt anxiety drop away. I remembered the sweet excitement of travelers before me.

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All of that again, he said, I long to see all of that again, the villages of the Pyrenées, Pau, the roads. O Lord, to smell French coffee again all mixed in with the smell of the earth, brandy, hay. Some of it will have changed, not all. The French peasant goes on forever. I asked if indeed there was any chance, any likelihood, that he could go. His smile was a resigned irony. Who knows, he said, that Saint Anthony didn't take the streetcar into Alexandria? There hasn't been a desert father in centuries and centuries, and there's considerable confusion as to the rules of the game. He indicated a field to our left, beyond the wood of white oak and sweetgum where we were walking, a field of wheat stubble. That's where I asked Joan Baez to take off her shoes and stockings so that I could see a woman's feet again. She was so lovely against the spring wheat. Back in the hermitage we ate goat's cheese and salted peanuts, and sipped whiskey from jelly glasses. On his table lay letters from Nicanor Parrá and Marguerite Yourcenar. He held the whiskey bottle up to the cold bright Kentucky sunlight blazing through the window. And then out to the privy, where he kicked the door with his hobnail boot, to shoo off the black snake who was usually inside. *Out! Out! You old son of a bitch! You can come back later.*

The great gate at Shirakawa, where the North begins, is one of the three largest checkpoints in all the kingdom. All poets who have passed through it have made a poem of the event. I approached it along a road overhung with dark trees. It was already autumn here, and winds troubled the branches above me. The unohana was still in bloom beside the road, and their profuse white blossoms met those of the blackberry brambles in the ditch. You would think an early snow had speckled all the underwood. Kiyosuke tells us in the *Fukuro Zoshi* that in ancient times no one went through this gate except in his finest clothes. Because of this Sora wrote: *A garland of white unohana flowers around my head, I passed through Shirakawa Gate, the only finery I could command.* We crossed the Abukuma River and walked north with the Aizu cliffs on our right, and villages on our left, Iwaki, Soma, Miharu. Over the mountains beyond them, we knew, were the counties Hitachi and Shimotsuke. We found the Shadow Pond, where all shadows cast on it are exact of outline. The day was overcast, how-

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ever, and we saw only the grey sky mirrored in it. At Sukagawa I visited the poet Tokyu, who holds a government post there.

Dissonance chiming with order, strict physical law in its dance with hazard, valences as weightless as light bonding an *aperitif à la gentiane* Suze, a newspaper, carafe, ace of Clubs, stummel. And in a shatter and jig of scialytic prismfall quiet women, Hortense Cézanne among her geraniums, Gertrude Stein resting her elbows on her knees like a washerwoman, Madame Ginoux, of Arles, reader of novels, sitting in a black dress against a yellow wall, a portrait painted by Vincent in three quarters of an hour, quiet women at the center of houses, and by the pipe, carafe, and newspaper on the tabletop men with a new inwardness of mind, an inwardness for listening to green silence, to watch tones and brilliances and subtleties of light, dawn, noon, and dusk, Étienne Louis Malus walking at sunset in the gardens of the Palais du Luxembourg, seeing how twice refracted level light was polarized by the palace windows, alert to remember what we would see and hold and share. From fields of yellow sedge to undergrowth of wild ferns tall as our shoulders, from slippery paths Indian file through trees to bear walks along black beaver ponds we set out to see the great rocks rolled into Vermont by glaciers ten thousand years ago.

Tokyu, once we were at the tea bowl, asked with what emotion I had passed through the great gate at Shirakawa. So taken had I been by the landscape, I admitted, and with memories of former poets and their emotions, that I composed few *haiku* of my own. The only one I would keep was: *The first poetry I found in the far north was the worksongs of the rice farmers.* We made three books of linked *haiku* beginning with this poem. Outside this provincial town on the post road there was a venerable chestnut tree under which a priest lived. In the presence of that tree I could feel that I was in the mountain forests where the poet Saigyo gathered nuts. I wrote these words then and there: *O holy chestnut tree, the Chinese write your name with the character for* tree *below that of* west, *the direction of all things holy.* Gyoki the priest of the common

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people in the Nara period had a chestnut walking stick, and the ridgepole of his house was chestnut. And I wrote this *haiku*: *Worldly men pass by the chestnut in bloom by the roof.* We ended our visit with Tokyu. We came to the renowned Asaka Hills and their many lakes. The *katsumi* iris, I knew, would be in bloom, and we left the high road to go see them.

Sequoia Langsdorfii is found in the Cretaceous of both British Columbia and Greenland, and *Gingko polymorpha* in the former of these localities. *Cinnamomum Scheuchzeri* occurs in the Dakota group of Western Kansas as well as at Fort Ellis. Sir William Dawson detects in strata regarded as Laramie by Professor G. M. Dawson, of the Geological Survey of Canada, a form which he considers to be allied to *Quercus antiqua*, Newby., from Rio Dolores, Utah, in strata positively declared to be the equivalent of the Dakota group. Besides these cases there are several in which the same species occurs in the Eocene and the Cretaceous, though wanting in the Laramie. *Cinnamomum Sezannense*, of the Paleocene of Sézanne and Gelinden, was found by Heer, not only in the upper Cretaceous of Patoot, but in the Cenomanian of Atane, in Greenland. *Myrtophyllum cryptoneuron* is common to the Paleocene of Gelinden and the Senonian of Westphalia, and the same is true of *Dewalquea Gelindensis*. *Sterculia variabilis* is another case of a Sézanne species occuring in the upper Cretaceous of Greenland, and Heer rediscovers in this same Senonian bed the Eocene plant *Sapotacites reticulatus* which he described in the Sachs-Thüringen lignite beds.

But not a single *katsumi* iris could we find. No one we asked, moreover, had ever heard of them. Night was coming on, and we made haste to have a quick look at the *Kurozuka* cave by taking a short cut at Nihonmatsu. We spent the night at Fukushima. Next day I stopped at Shinobu village to see the stone where *shinobu-zuri* cloth used to be dyed. It is a composite stone with an amazing facet smooth as glass of many different minerals and quartz. The stone used to be far up the mountain, I was told by a child, but the many tourists who came to see it trampled the crops on the way, so the villagers brought it down to the square. I wrote: *Now only the nimble*

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hands of girls planting rice give us an idea of the ancient dyers at their work. We crossed by ferry at Tsuki-no-wa—Ring around the Moon!—and came to Se-no-ue, a post town. There is a field nearby, with a hill named Maruyama in it: on this hill are the ruins of the warrior Sato's house. I wept to see the broken gate at the foot of the hill. A temple stands in the neighborhood with the graves of the Sato family in its grounds. I felt that I was in China at the tombstone of Yang Hu, which no person of cultivation has ever visited without weeping.

Through forests of sweetgum and hickory rising to larch, meadows of fern and thistle, we came toward the end of a day to an old mill of the kind I had known at Price's Shoals in South Carolina, wagons and mules under its elms, dogs asleep in the shade beneath the wagons, chickens and ducks maundering about. This New England country mill was, however, of brick, with tall windows, but with the same wide doors and ample loading platforms. It was a day in which we had lost time. I interrupted our singing along a logging road to say that my watch had stopped. So had hers, she said, or the map was cockeyed, or night comes earlier in this part of New Hampshire than anywhere else in the Republic. Clouds and a long rain had kept most of the day in twilight. A new rain was setting in for the night. But there was the mill, and we were saved from another night of wet such as we had endured the second night out. Tentless, we had slept in our bedrolls zipped together into one on a slope of deep ferns and waked to find ourselves as wet as if we had slept in a creek. The map showed shelter ahead, which we had expected to reach. But there had been the strange advancement of the day in defiance of my watch, which had stopped hours ago and started up again. What luck, to chance on this old mill.

In the temple I saw, after tea with the priests, the sword of Yoshitsune and the haversack of his loyal servant Benkei. It was the Feast Day of Boys and the Iris. *Show with pride,* I wrote of the arms in the temple, *the warrior's sword, his companion's pack on the first of May.* We went on and spent the night

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at Iisuka, having had a bath in a hot spring beforehand. Our inn was dirty, lampless, and the beds were pallets of straw on an earthen floor. There were fleas in the pallets, mosquitoes in the room. A fierce storm came up in the night. The roof leaked. All of this brought on an attack of fever and chills, and I was miserable and afraid of dying next day. I rode awhile and walked awhile, weak and in pain. We got as far as the gate into County Okido. I passed the castles at Abumizuri and Shiroishi. I'd wanted to see the tomb of Sanekata, one of the Fujiwara, a poet and exile, but the road there was all mud after the rains, and the tomb was overgrown with grass, I was told, and hard to find. We spent the night at Iwanuma. *How far to Kasajima and is this river of mud the road to take?*

Our packs off, the sleeping bags laid out and zipped together, supper in the pan, we could listen to the rain in that windy old mill, hugging our luck and each other. Pack rats in little white pants, and spiders, and lizards, no doubt, I said, and we will make friends with them all. Her hair had lost the spring of its curls and stuck rakishly to her forehead and cheeks, the way I had first seen it as she climbed from a swimming pool in the Poconos. What are you talking about? she asked. She searched my eyes with a smiling and questioning look. I thought by such comic inquisitiveness that our luck was hard to believe. The mill there, Sweetheart, I repeated, pointing. A grand old New England water mill, dry as a chip and as substantial as Calvin's *Institutes*. She looked at the mill, at me again, and her mouth fell open. The stone steps to the door rose from a thicket of bramble we would have to climb across with care. There was something of the Florentine in all these old brick mills. Their Tuscan flavor came from architectural manuals issued by Scotch engineering firms that had listened to Ruskin and believed him when he said there was truth in Italian proportions and justice in Italian windows.

With what joy I found the Takekuma pine, double-trunked, just as the olden poets said. When Noin made his second visit to this tree, it had been cut down for bridge pilings by some upstart of a government official. It has been replanted over the years, it always grows back the same, always the most

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beautiful of pines. I was seeing it in its thousandth year. When I set out on my journey the poet Kyohaku had written: *Do not neglect to see the pine at Takekuma amid late spring cherry blossoms in the far north.* And for him, as an answer, I wrote: *We saw cherry blossoms together, you and I, three months ago. Now I have come to the double pine in all its grandeur.* On the fourth of May we arrived at Sendai across the Natori River, the day one throws iris leaves on the roof for good health. We put up at an inn. I sought out the painter Kaemon, who showed me the clover fields of Miyagino, the hills of Tamada, Yokono, and Tsutsuji-ga-oka, all white with rhododendron in bloom, the pine wood of Konoshita, where at noon it seems to be night, and where it is so damp you feel the need of an umbrella. He also showed me the shrines of Yakushido and Tenjin. A painter is the best of guides.

The Bay of Spezia, mulberry groves, sheds where the silkworms fatten, but here, the sun in golden sheets and slats on the floor, young Revely's study was all Archimedes and Sicily, or a tabletop by Holbein with instruments in brass and walnut, calipers, rules, maps, calculations in silverpoint and red ink. Under a map in French colors, slate blues and provincial yellows, poppy reds, cabbage greens, a sepia line from Genoa across the Lunae Portus to Pisa, there sat in harmonic disarray a wooden bowl of quicksilver (a cup of Tuscan moonlight, a dish for gnomes to sup down in the iron roots of mountains where the earthquake demons swill lava and munch gold), cogged wheels, a screw propeller, drawings of frigates, steamboats, a machinery of gears and levers colored blue and yellow, lighthouses with cyclopean lamps, plans of harbors and moorings, a lump of rosin, a china cup full of ink, a half-burnt match, a box of watercolors, a block of ivory, a volume of Laplace, a book of conic sections, spherics, logarithms, Saunderson's *Algebra*, Simms's *Trigonometry*, and most beautiful of all this Archimagian gear, the newly unpacked theodolite, tilted in its fine calibrations, gleaming index and glass.

When we parted, the painter Kaemon gave me drawings of Matsushima and Shiogama and two pairs of sandals of straw

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with iris-purple straps. *I walk in iris blossoms, it seems, so rich the blue of my sandal laces.* He also gave me drawings to guide my way along the Narrow Road to the Deep North. At Ichikawa I found the tall inscribed stone of Tsubo-no-ishibumi. The characters were legible through lichen and moss. Taga Castle was built on this site the first year of Jinki by order of General Ono-no-Azumabito, Governor of the Far North by decree of the Emperor, rebuilt in the sixth year of Tempyohoji by Emi-no-Asakari, Governor General of the Provinces East and North. This stone is 965 years old. Mountains break and fall, rivers shift their beds, highways grow up in grass, rocks sink into the earth, trees wither with age, and yet this stone has stood from ancient times. I wept to see it, and knelt before its presence, very happy and very sad. We went on across the Noda-no-tamagawa River to the pine forest of Sue-no-matsu-yama, where there is a temple and graveyard that gave me melancholy thoughts of the death that must end all our lives, whatever be our love of the world.

I could imagine the inside: spiderwebs and dog droppings, the inevitable Mason jar and flattened crump of overalls that one always found in abandoned buildings, a newspaper gone brown and some enigma of a utensil that turned out to be the handle of a meat grinder or meal sifter or mangle gearing. I anticipated rills of ancient flour in the seams of sills, the flat smell of mildewed wheat, the quick smell of wet brick. Mill? she said. Her smile was strangely goofy. She took me by the sleeve. What mill? Then I stood dumb and cold. There was no mill. Ahead of us was the edge of a wood, nothing more. The dusk thickened as we looked at each other in the rain. We went on, stubbornly. We knew better than to follow a blazed trail by dark. We hoped that the campsite with shelter marked on the map was just on the other side of the wood before us. It was not yet wholly dark. Were it not a rainy day, we might plausibly have an hour's half light yet; plenty of time to nip through the wood, get to the shelter, and be dry for the night. You say you saw an old mill? Underfoot there were rocks and roots again. We longed for the easy tread of the logging road.

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We came to Shiogama just as the curfew bell was tolling, the darkening sky completely cloudless, the island of Magaki-ga-shima already but a shadow in a sea that was white with moonlight. We could hear the fishermen counting their take. How lonely it is to enter a town at dusk! We heard a blind singer chanting the rustic folksongs of the north. Next day, we worshiped at the Myojin Shrine of Shiogama, a handsome building. The way to it is paved, the fence around it is painted vermillion. It pleased me that the powers of the gods are so honored here in the Deep North, and I made a sincere obeisance at the altar. An ancient lantern burns near the altar to keep alive the memory of Izumi-no-Saburo, that gallant warrior of five hundred years ago. In the afternoon we took a boat to Matsushima, two miles out. Everyone knows that these are the most beautiful islands in all Japan. I would add that they rival Tungting Hu in Hunan and Si Hu in Chekiang. These islands are our China. Every pine branch is perfect. They have the grace of women walking, and so perfectly are the islands placed that Heaven's serenity is apparent everywhere.

Ezra Pound came down the *salita* through the olive grove, white mane jouncing as he stepped his cane with precision stride by long stride. He wore a cream sports jacket, a blue shirt with open collar, pleated white slacks, brown socks and espadrilles. The speckled boney fingers of his left hand pinched a panama by the brim. The way was strewn with hard green olives torn from their branches by a storm the week before. *Shocking waste*, Miss Rudge said, *and yet it seems to happen year after year, and somehow there's always an olive crop, isn't there, Ezra?* Then, over her shoulder, she asked me if I knew the Spanish for *romance*. Ezra wants to know, and can't remember. *As in* mediaeval romance? I ask, startled. *Romanthé, I think.* Novela *would be a later word.* Relato, *perhaps. Ezra*, she called ahead, *would that be right? No!* he said, a quiver of doubt in his voice. Romancero, I said, *is a word Mr Pound himself has used of Spanish balladry.* Romancero, *Ezra?* Miss Rudge said cheerfully. Single file was the rule on the *salita*. He always went first, up or down, steep and rough as it was. *Not the word*, he said, without looking back.

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Ojima, though called an island, is a narrow strip of land. Ungo, the shinto priest, lived here in his retirement. We were shown the rock where he liked to sit for hours. We saw small houses among the pines, blue smoke from their chimneys, the red moon rising beyond them. My room at the inn overlooked the bay and the islands. A great wind howled, and clouds scudded at a gallop across the moon; nevertheless, I kept my windows open, for I had that wonderful feeling that only travelers know: that this was a different world from any I had known before. Different winds, a different moon, an alien sea. Sora, too, felt the peculiarity of the place and the moment, and wrote: *Flute-tongued cuckoo, you must long for the heron's wings of silver to fly from island to island at Matsushima.* So fine was my emotion that I could not sleep. I got out my notebook and read again the poems my friends gave me when I set out, about these islands: a poem by Sodo in Chinese, a *waka* by Dr Hara Anteki, *haiku* by the samurai Dakushi and Sampu. Being at Matsushima made the poems much richer, and the poems made Matsushima a finer experience.

We juggled in debate whether we should doss down then and there in leafmuck and boulder rubble, or, heartened by the thin light we found in clearings, suppose that the failure of the day was more raindusk than the beginning of night, and push on. We found at least an arm of the lake on the map in a quarter of an hour. It was a spillway which we had to cross on a footlog. Rabbitfoot, I said, and don't look down. We got across more in dismay at the unfairness of a footlog to deal with in failing light and drizzle than with any skill with footlogs. What a miserable mean thing to do, she said, putting a blithering log to balance across with both of us winded and wet and you seeing hotels. The rain had settled in to stay. We had fair going for a while and then we came upon swamp. There was no question of camping in water that came over our shoe tops. I broke out a flashlight, she held onto my pack so as not to get lost from me, and we nosed our way through ferns and huckleberries, sinking up to our shins in mud. I think I'm scared, she said. Of what? Nothing in particular. Of everything. I'm scared, I said, if for no other reason than that I don't know where we are.

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We set out for Hiraizumi on the twelfth, our immediate plans being to visit the Aneha Pine and Odae Bridge. Our way was along a woodcutter's path in the mountains, as lonely and quiet a trail as I have ever trod. By some inattention to my instructions I lost my way and came instead to Ishinomaki, a port in a bay where we saw a hundred ships. The air was thick with smoke from chimneys. What a busy place! They seemed to know nothing of putting up travelers on foot, or of the art of looking at scenery. So we had to make do with shoddy quarters for the night. We left next day by a road that went I knew not whither. It took us past a ford on the Sode, the meadows of Obuchi, and the grasslands of Mano. We followed the river and came at last to Hiraizumi, having wandered a good twenty miles out of our way. We looked with melancholy on the ruins of the Fujiwara estate, now so many rice paddies. We found Yasuhira's abandoned house to the north of the Koromo-ga-seki gate. Though the grandeur of the Fujiwara lasted three generations only, their achievements will be remembered forever, and looking on the ruins of their castles and lands I wept that such glory has come to nothing, and covered my face with my hat.

In July I saw several cuckoos skimming over a large pond; and found, after some observation, that they were feeding on the *libellulae*, or dragonflies, some of which they caught as they settled on the weeds, and some as they were on the wing. Notwithstanding what Linnaeus says, I cannot be induced to believe that they are birds of prey. A countryman told me that he had found a young fern-owl in the nest of a small bird on the ground; and that it was fed by the little bird. I went to see this extraordinary phenomenon, and found that it was a young cuckoo hatched in the nest of a titlark; it was become vastly too big for its nest. The dupe of a dam appeared at a distance, hovering about with meat in its mouth, and expressing the greatest solicitude. Ray remarks, that birds of the *gallinae* order, as cocks and hens, partridges and pheasants, are *pulveratrices*, such as dust themselves, using that method of cleansing their feathers, and ridding themselves of their vermin. As far as I can observe, many birds that wash themselves would never dust; but here I find my-

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self mistaken; for common house sparrows are great *pulveratrices*, being frequently seen groveling and wallowing in dusty roads; and yet they are great washers. Does not the skylark dust?

Tall grass grows over the dreams of an ancient aristocracy. Look there! Did I not see Yoshitsune's servant Kanefusa in the white blur of the unohana flowers? But not all was gone. The temples remain, with their statues and tombs and sutras. *Dry in the rains of May, the Hikari Do keeps its gold and gloom for a thousand years.* We reached Cape Ogoru next day, and the little island of Mizu in the river. Onward, we came to the Dewa border, where the guards questioned us so long and so suspiciously (they rarely see foot travelers even in the best of weather) that we got a late start. Dusk caught us on the mountain road and we had to stay the night with a toll-keeper, and were lucky to find even his hut in so desolate a place. *Fleas and lice bit us, and all night a horse pissed beside my mat.* The toll-keeper said that many mountains lay between us and Dewa. I was most surely apt to get lost and perish. He knew a stout young man who would consent to be our guide, a strapping fellow with a sword and oak staff. He was indeed necessary: the way was an overgrown wilderness. Black clouds just above our heads darkened the thick underwood of bamboo.

Where we are, she said, is slogging our way by flashlight through a New England swamp up to our butts in goo and I'm so tired I could give up and howl. The important thing to understand, I said, is that we aren't on the trail. We were, I think, she said, when we got off into this. We couldn't be far off it. Off the trail, she said in something of a snit, is off the trail. And there's something wrong with my knees. They're shaking. We're probably walking into the lake that stupid log back there went over an outlet of. I turned and gave her as thorough an inspection as I could under the circumstances. She was dead tired, she was wet, and her knees did indeed shake. Lovely knees, but they were cold and splashed with mud. I slipped her pack off and fitted it across my chest, accoutred front and back like a paratrooper. We went on, the flashlight beam finding nothing ahead but bushes in water, a

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swamp of ferns. There was a rudimentary trail, it seemed. At least someone had put down logs in the more succulent places. It is the trail, I insisted. A yelp from behind, a disgusted and slowly articulated *Jiminy!* and while I was helping her up, sobs. Don't cry, Sweetheart! It rolled. The motherless log rolled when I stepped on it.

In Obanazawa I visited the merchant poet Seifu, who had often stopped on business trips to see me in Edo. He was full of sympathy for our hard way across the mountains, and made up for it with a splendid hospitality. Sora was entranced by the silkworm nurseries, and wrote: *Come out, toad, and let me see you: I hear your got-a-duck got-a-duck under the silkworm house.* And: *The silkworm workers are dressed like ancient gods.* We climbed to the quiet temple of Ryushakuji, famous for being in so remote and peaceful a site. The late afternoon sun was still on it, and on the great rocks around it, when we arrived, and shone golden in the oaks and pines that have stood there for hundreds of years. The very ground seemed to be eternity, a velvet of moss. I felt the holiness of the place in my bones; my spirit partook of it with each bow that I made to the shrines in the silent rocks. *Silence as whole as time. The only sound is crickets.* Our next plan was to go down the Mogami River by boat, and while we were waiting for one to take us, the local poets at Oishida sought me out and asked me to show them how to make linked verses, of which they had heard but did not know the technique. With great pleasure I made a whole book for them.

Could she stand? She thought so. It hurt, but she could stand. I shone the flashlight as far as I could ahead. Treetops! Treetops ahead, Samwise. Higher ground, don't you think that means? She limped frighteningly. We sloshed on. I could tell how miserable she was from her silence. We were slowly getting onto firmer ground. I studied her again by flashlight. She was a very tired girl with a sprained ankle or the nearest thing to it. I was getting my second wind, and put it to good use by heaving her onto my hip. She held to my neck, kissing my ear in gratitude. By coupling my hands under her behind, I could carry her to high ground if it was

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near enough. We reached forest, with roots to slip on and rocks to stumble over. The flashlight found a reasonably level place. I cleared trash from it while she held the light. We spread our tarpaulin, unrolled and zipped together the sleeping bags. It was our pride that we were hiking without a tent, though at that moment we longed for one. We undressed in the rain, stuffing our damp clothes into our packs. At least they wouldn't get any wetter. We slipped naked into the sleeping bag. Too tired to shiver, she said. She got dried peaches and apples from her pack, and we chewed them, lying on our elbows, looking out into the dark.

The Mogami River flows down from the mountains through Yamagata Province, with many treacherous rapids along the way, and enters the sea at Sakata. We went down the river in a farmer's old-timey rice boat, our hearts in our mouths. We saw Shiraito-no-take, the Silver-Stringed Waterfall, half-hidden by thick bamboo, and the temple of Sennindo. Because the river was high and rough, I wrote: *On all the rains of May in one river, I tossed along down the swift Mogami.* I was glad to get ashore. On the third of June we climbed Haguro Mountain and were granted an audience with Egaku the high priest, who treated us with civility and put us up in a cabin. Next day, in the Great Hall with the high priest, I wrote: *This valley is sacred. The sweet wind smells of snow.* On the fifth we saw the Gongen Shrine, of uncertain date. It may be the shrine Fujiwara-no-Tokihira in the *Rites and Ceremonies* says is on Mount Sato in Dewa, confusing the Chinese for *Sato* and *Kuro, Haguro* being a variant of *Kuro.* Here they teach Total Meditation as the Tendai sect understands it, and the Freedom of the Spirit and Enlightenment, teaching as pure as moonlight and as sweet as a single lantern in pitch dark.

He and Bruni, the watercolor painter, you know, they were the closest of friends, used to argue God something terrible. He was an atheist, Tatlin, and Bruni was a very Russian believer. It terrified me as a child. Tatlin would take us to swim in the river in the spring, and he wore no icon around his neck and didn't cross himself before diving in. He was wonderful with children, a grown-up who knew how to play with

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us without condescending, but with other people he was self-centered, vain about his singing voice. Pasternak, now, had no way with children at all. He didn't even see them. Tatlin made his own lute, a replica of a traditional Slavic lute such as blind singers had, strolling from village to village. Especially in the south. What did Tatlin look like? O, he was lanky, as you say, skinny. He had slate-grey eyes, very jolly eyes that had a way of going dead and silvery when he fell into a brown study. His hair was, how shall I put it, a grey blond. When he sang the blind singers' songs he made his eyes look blind, rolled back, unseeing. The voice was between baritone and bass. He was not educated, you know. He lived in the bell tower of a monastery.

On Haguro Mountain there are hundreds of small houses where priests meditate in strictest discipline, and will meditate, to keep this place holy, as long as there are people on the earth. On the eighth we climbed Mount Gassan. I had a paper rope around my shoulders, and a shawl of white cotton on my head. For eight miles we strove upward, through the clouds, which were like a fog around us, over rocks slick with ice, through snow. When we came to the top, in full sunlight, I was out of breath and frozen. How glorious the sight! We spent the night there, on beds of leaves. On the way down next day we came to the smithy where Gassan used to make his famous swords, tempering them in the cold mountain stream. His swords were made of his devotion to his craft and of the divine power latent in the mountain. Near here I saw a late-blooming cherry in the snow. I cannot speak of all I saw, but this cherry will stand for all, determined as it was, however late, however unseasonable, to bring its beauty into the world. Egaku, when I returned, asked me to make poems of my pilgrimage to this sacred mountain.

Bedded down in dark and rain, we felt both a wonderful security, warm and dry in our bed, and a sharp awareness that we didn't know where in the world we were. That swamp grew there since they printed the map, she said. I feel, I said, as if we were all alone in the middle of a wood as big as Vermont. We could be six feet from the lake, or on the merest island of trees in the world's biggest swamp. I don't care

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where we are, she said. We're here, we're dry, we're not in that swamp. We hugged awhile, and then lay on our backs to distribute the rock weight of our exhaustion, a hand on each other's tummy for sympathy and fellowship. You saw a mill? she said. A fine old water mill, of red brick, about a hundred years old, I suppose. As plain as day. I said that I was both glad and a bit frightened to have seen it, a superimposition of desire on reality. The first ghost I'd ever seen, if a mill can be a ghost. If it had been real, we would have had a hot supper, with coffee, and could have set up house, and got laid, twice running, after a wonderful long time of toning things up beforehand, with porcupines standing on their hind legs and looking through the windows. But she was asleep.

How cold the white sickle moon above the dark valleys of Mount Haguro. How many clouds had gathered and broken apart before we could see the silent moon above Mount Gassan. Because I could not speak of Mount Yudono, I wet my sleeves with tears. *Tears stood in my eyes,* Sora wrote, *as I walked over the coins at Yudono, along the sacred way.* Next day we came to Tsuru-ga-oka Castle, where the warrior Nagayama Shigeyuki welcomed me and Zushi Sakichi, who had accompanied us from Haguro. We wrote a book of linked verse together. We returned to our boat and went down the river Sakata. Here we were the guests of Dr Fugyoku. I wrote: *Cool of the evening in the winds crisscrossing the beach at Fukuura, and twilight: but the tip of Mount Atsumi was still bright with the sun. Deep into the estuary of Mogami River the summer sun has quenched its fire.* By now my fund of natural beauty was bountiful, yet I could not rest until I had seen Lake Kisagata. To get there I walked ten miles along a path, over rocky hills, down to sandy beaches and up again. The sun was touching the horizon when I arrived. Mount Chokai was hidden in fog.

We woke next morning to find that we were no more than twenty yards from the campsite we were trying to reach. Golly, she said, looking out of the sleeping bag. A black lake lay in a cedar wood whose greenish dark made its shores seem noonbright in early morning. We rose naked and put our clothes on bushes in the sun. She spied blueberries for our mush. I managed to get wood ash in our coffee, and we had

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to eat with the one spoon, as mine had got lost. The lake was too brackish to swim in, so we stood in the shallows and soaped each other, dancing from the chill of the water. I was rinsing her back with handfuls of water poured over her shoulders when I saw a popeyed man gaping at us from beyond our breakfast fire. His face was scholarly and bespectacled and he wore a Boy Scout uniform. The staff in his hand gave him a Biblical air. He was warning away his troop with a backward hand. Hi! she hailed him. We're just getting off some grime from the trail. We got lost in the rain last night and came here through the swamp. We'll give you time, he said with a grin. Oh for Pete's sake, said she, proceeding to soap up my back. We're just people. They've seen people, haven't they?

If the halflight and the rain were so beautiful at Kisagata, how lovely the lake would be in good weather. Next day was indeed brilliant, I sailed across the lake, stopping at the mere rock of an island where the monk Noin once meditated. On the far shore we found the ancient cherry tree of Saigyo's poem, in which he compares its blossoms to the froth on waves. From the large hall of the temple Kanmanjuji you can see the whole lake, and beyond it Mount Chokai like a pillar supporting Heaven, and the gate of Muyamuya faintly in the west, the highway to Akita in the east, and Shiogoshi in the north, where the lake meets the breakers of the ocean. Only two lakes are so beautiful: Matsushima is the other. But whereas Matsushima is gay and joyful, Kisagata is grave and religious, as if some sorrow underlay its charm. *Silk tree blossoming in the monotonous rain at Kisagata, you are like the Lady Seishi in her sorrow. On the wet beach at Shiogoshi the herons strut in the sea's edge. Some sweetmeat not known elsewhere is probably sold at Kisagata on the feast days.* Teiji has a poem about Kisagata: *In the evening the fishermen sit and rest in their doorways.* Sora wrote of the ospreys: *Does God tell them how to build their nests higher than the tide?*

I loved her for her brashness. Her seventeen-year-old body, in all the larger and speculative senses aesthetic and biological, was something to see. It was Spartan, it was Corinthian: hale of limb, firmnesses continuing into softnesses, softnesses

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into firmnesses. There was a little boy's stance in the clean porpoise curve of calf, a tummy flat and grooved. Corinth asserted itself in hips and breasts, in the denim blue of her eyes, the ruck of her upper lip, in the pert girlishness of her nose. We aren't proud, she said. I can't recommend the pond here, as it's full of leaf trash from several geological epochs back. The blueberries over there on that spit are delicious. By this time there were Boy Scout eyes over the scoutmaster's shoulders. We went back to our stretch of the beach, dried in the sun while making more coffee, and fished shirts from our packs in deference to our neighbors. It was further along the trail that day that we found in a lean-to a pair of Jockey shorts, size small, stuck full of porcupine quills. One of our Boy Scouts', she said. Do you suppose he was in or out of them when Brother Porky took a rolling dive?

Leaving Sakata, we set out on the hundred-and-thirty-mile road to the county seat of Kaga Province. Clouds gathered over the mountains on the Hokuriku Road, down which we had to go, and clouds gathered in my heart at the thought of the distance. We walked through the Nezu Gate into Echigo, we walked through the Ichiburi Gate into Ecchu. We were nine days on the road. The weather was wet and hot all the way, and my malaria acted up and made the going harder. *The sixth of July, the nights are changing, and tomorrow the Weaver Star and the Shepherd Star cross the Milky Way together.* At Ichiburi I was kept awake by two Geisha in the next room. They had been visiting the Ise Shrine with an old man, who was going home the next day, and they were plying him with silly things to say to all their friends. How frivolous and empty their lives! And next day they tried to attach themselves to us, pleading that they were pilgrims. I was stern with them, for they were making a mock of religion, but as soon as I had shooed them away my heart welled with pity. Beyond the forty-eight shoals of the Kurobe, we came to the village of Nago and asked to see the famous wistaria of Tako.

Hephaistiskos, our Renault bought in Paris, who had slept in a stable in Villefranche, kicked a spring outside Tarbes, and spent the night under the great chestnut tree in the square at Montignac, under palms at Menton and under pines at Ra-

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venna, was hoisted onto the foredeck of the *Kriti* at Venice for a voyage down the Adriatic to Athens. We had no such firm arrangements for a berth. Along with two Parisian typists of witty comeliness, two German cyclists blond, brown, and obsequious, a trio of English consisting of a psychiatrist and her two lovers, the one an Oxford undergraduate, the other the Liberal Member from Bath, and a seasoned traveler from Alton, Illinois, a Mrs Brown, we were billeted on the aft deck, in the open air, with cots to sleep on. All the cabins were taken by Aztecs. *Mexican Rotary and their wives,* explained the lady psychiatrist, who had Greek and who had interviewed the Captain, leaving a flea in his ear. The sporting bartender had shouted to us over the Greek band, in a kind of English, that it was ever the way of the pirate who owned this ship to sell all the tickets he could, let the passengers survive by their wits. *It's only a week. No say drachma, say thrakmé.*

The wistaria of Tako, I was told, was five lonely miles up the coast, with no house of any sort nearby or along the way. Discouraged, I went on into Kaga Province. *Mist over the rice fields, below me the mutinous waves.* I crossed the Unohanayama Mountains, the Kurikara-dani Valley, and came on the fifteenth of July to Kanazawa. Here the merchant Kasho from Osaka asked me to stay with him at his inn. There used to live in Kanazawa a poet named Issho, whose verse was known over all Japan. He had died the year before. I went to his grave with his brother, and wrote there: *Give some sign, O silent tomb of my friend, if you can hear my lament and the gusts of autumn wind joining my grief.* At a hermit's house: *This autumn day is cold, let us slice cucumbers and mad-apples and call them dinner.* On the road: *The sun is red and heedless of time, but the wind knows how cold it is, O red is the sun!* At Komtasu, Dwarf Pine: *The right name for this place, Dwarf Pine, wind combs the clover and makes waves in the grass.* At the shrine at Tada I saw the samurai Sanemori's helmet and the embroidered shirt he wore under his armor.

The Liberal Member from Bath, the Oxford undergraduate name of Gerald, and the lady British psychiatrist demonstrated the Greek folkdances played by the band. *A Crimean Field Hospital,* I said of our cots and thin blankets set up as our

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dormitory on the fantail of the *Kriti*. *Exactly!* said the Liberal Member from Bath, accepting us thereby. *Rather jolly, don't you think?* The Parisian typists chittered and giggled. *Pas de la retraite! Que nous soyons en famille.* Mrs Brown of Alton tucked a blanket under her chin and undressed with her back to the Adriatic. The Parisian typists came to her aid, and they became a trio, with their cots together, like the English. They stripped to lace bras and panties, causing the Liberal Member from Bath to say, *O well, there's nothing else for it, is there?* The German boys undressed pedantically to pissburnt briefs of ultracontemporary conciseness. We followed suit, nothing daunted, and the Liberal Member from Bath did everybody one better, and took off every stitch, a magnified infant, chubby of knee, paunchy, with random swirls and tufts of ginger hair. The Parisian typists squealed. The Germans looked at him with keen slit eyes. He was surely overstepping a bound.

Sanemori's helmet was decorated with swirls of chrysanthemums across the visor and earflaps; a vermilion dragon formed the crest, between two great horns. When Sanemori died and the helmet was enshrined, Kiso Yoshinaka wrote a poem and sent it by Higuchi-no-Jiro: *With what wonder do I hear a cricket chirping inside an empty helmet.* The snowy summit of Shirane Mountain was visible all the way to the Nata Shrine, which the Emperor Kazan built to the Goddess of Mercy Kannon. The garden here was of rocks and pines. *The rocks are white at the Rock Temple, but the autumn wind is whiter.* At the hot spring nearby, where I bathed: *Washed in the steaming waters at Yamanaka, do I need also to pick chrysanthemums?* I was told by the innkeeper that it was here that Teishitsu realized his humiliating deficiencies as a poet, and began to study under Teitoku when he returned to Kyoto. Alas, while we were here, my companion Sora began to have a pain in his stomach, and left to go to his kinpeople in Nagashima. He wrote a farewell poem: *No matter if I fall on the road, I will fall among flowers.*

The Liberal Member from Bath had indeed overstepped a bound in taking off all his clothes on the fantail of the *Kriti*. Just as the lady psychiatrist was urging her other lover, the

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Oxford undergraduate, to join him in cheeking these outrageous foreigners for booking us passages and then deploying us out here under the sky in what the American archaeologists so aptly dub the Crimean Field Hospital, the Captain of the ship, together with the Steward, made their way through a tumult of pointing Mexican Rotarians and arrived in our midst whirling their arms. The Liberal Member stared at them popeyed. *What's the Pirate King saying? Who can understand the blighter?* He says you must put on your clothes, I offered. He says you are an affront to morals and an insult to decency. *He does, does he?* said the lady psychiatrist. *Gerald dear! Off with your undershorts.* She then, with help from Gerald dear and the Liberal Member, set out on a speech in Greek which we realized with an exchange of glances was a patchwork of Homeric phrases, more or less syntactical on the psychiatrist's part, but formulaic from her chorus, so that her *what an overweening hatefulness has crossed the barrier of thy teeth* was seconded by Gerald dear's *when that rosyfingered dawn had shed her beams over mortals and immortals together.*

When Sora left me, because of his illness, I felt both his sadness and mine, and wrote: *Let the dew fade the words on my hat, Two Pilgrims Traveling Together.* When I stayed at the Zenshoji Temple, they gave me a poem of Sora's that he had left there for me: *All night I heard the autumn wind in the hills above the shrine.* I too listened to the wind that night, grieving for my companion. Next morning I attended services, ate with the priests, and was leaving when a young monk ran after me with ink block, brush, and paper, begging for a poem. I wrote: *For your kindness I should have swept the willow leaves from the garden.* Such was my sweet confusion at being asked for a poem that I left with my sandals untied. I rented a boat at Yoshizaki and rowed out to see the pine of Shiogoshi. The beauty of its setting is best caught in Saigyo's poem: *Urging the wind against the salt sea, the Shiogoshi pine sheds moonlight from its branches.* At Kanazawa I had been joined by the poet Hokushi, who walked with me as far as the Tenryuji Temple in Matsuoka, far further than he had meant to go.

We notice the ugliness of the Hellenistic and Roman style of Greek lettering as compared to the Archaic. Small columns of

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marble lying about that look as if they might have been grave markers. The Tower of the Winds with its curious figures that look Baroque: a few columns left standing, forming a corner of the street. This sort of ruin is actually what is most prevalent, especially at the theatres and at Eleusis, dismantled Roman ruins built on top of the Greek. An excavation trench near the church with a large urn only half dug out, under an olive tree. More piles of marble, looking very unorderly and as if the archaeologist had never been there: no attempt to order, classify, straighten. Little indication of street levels, except around the standing columns, these being straight shafts of marble, rather than sections fitted together. The Greek snails. We photographed a snailshell in your hand held beside a piece of marble ornament. What a motif. The pattern on the snails much more closely resembling the Geometric and Cycladic jars. The snails are caught by the sun as they climb a column and cooked there in their shells, which cling to the stone. Their spiral design is a chestnut brown band separated from a charcoal band by a thin white line.

It was only three miles to Fukui. The way, however, was dark, as I had started thither after supper. The poet Tosai lived there, whom I had known in Edo ten years before. As soon as I arrived I asked for him. A citizen directed me, and as soon as I found a house charmingly neglected, fenced around by a profusion of gourd vines, moonflowers, wild cockscomb knee-deep, and goosefoot blocking the way to the front door, I knew this was Tosai's home and no other's. I knocked. A woman answered, saying that Tokai was downtown somewhere. I was delighted that he had taken a wife, and told him so with glee when I routed him out of a wine-shop later. I stayed with him for three days. When I departed, saying that I wanted to see the full moon over Tsuruga, he decided to come with me, tucking up his house kimono as his only concession to the road. The peak of Shirane gave way to that of Hina. At Asamuzu Bridge we saw the reeds of Tamae in bloom. With the first migrating geese in the sky above me, I entered Tsuruga on the fourteenth. The moon was to be full the next night. We went to the Myojin Shrine of Kei, which honors the soul of the Emperor Chuai, bringing, as is the custom, a handful of white sand for the courtyard.

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Most of them are plants that are abundantly represented in nearly all the more recent deposits, such as *Taxodium Europaeum,* found all the way from the Middle Bagshot of Bournemouth to the Pliocene of Meximieux, *Ficus liliaefolia, Laurus primigenia,* and *Cinnamomum lanceolatum,* abundant in nearly all the Oligocene and Miocene beds of Europe. *Quercus chlorophylla* occurs in the Mississippi Tertiary as well as at Skopau in Sachs-Thüringen, and is also abundant in the Miocene, and *Ficus tiliaefolia* is found in the Green River formation at Florrisant, Colorado. The two species of hazel, and also the sensitive fern from the Fort Union deposits regarded by Dr Newberry as identical with the living forms, must be specifically so referred until fruits or other parts are found to show the contrary. Forms of the Gingko tree occur not only in the Fort Union beds, but in the lower Laramie beds at Point of Rocks, Wyoming Territory, which differ inappreciably except in size of leaf from the living species. A few Laramie forms occur in Cretaceous strata.

This was a custom begun by the priest Yugyo, so that at the full of the moon the area before the shrine would be as white as frost. *The pure full moon shown on Yugyo the Bishop's sand.* But on the night of the fifteenth it rained. *But for the fickle weather of the north I would have seen the full moon in autumn.* The sixteenth, however, was fine, and I went shell-gathering on the beach. A man named Tenya came with me and his servants with a picnic. We savored the loneliness of the long beaches. *Autumn comes to the sea, and the beach is more desolate than that at Suma. Clover petals blown into the sea roll up with fine pink shells in the waves.* I asked Tosai to write an account of our day's excursion and to deposit it at the temple for other pilgrims. My friend Rotsu met me when I returned, and went with me to Mino Province. We rode into Ogaki on horseback, and we were met by Sora. At Joko's house we were welcomed by Zensen, Keiko, and many other friends who acted as if I had returned from the dead. On the sixth of September I left for the shrine at Ise, though I was still tired from my journey to the far north. *Tight clam shells fall open in the autumn, just as I, no sooner made comfortable than I feel the call of the road.* Friends, goodbye!

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A. R. AMMONS

The Ridge Farm

1

The lean, far-reaching, hung-over sway
of the cedars this morning!
vexed by the wind and working tight

but the snow's packed in, wet-set,
and puffed solid: the cedars nod to
an average under gusts and blusters:

yesterday afternoon cleared the
sunset side of trees, the hemlocks
especially, limbering loose, but
the morning side, the lee, sunless
again today, overbalances:

the grackles form long strings
of trying to sit still; they weight
down the wagging branchwork snow stuck
branch to branch, tree to shrub,
imposing weeds

2

last night, the wind clunked
the icy heads of shrubs
against the house—
a long night of chunk-money spilling

3

a poet hands me his poem and says,
this is not my true voice, only a
line or so:

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good, I say, but he is
disappointed,
having found a self, if still reticent,
in himself he likes or would like to like:
but is his true
voice more interesting
than the one in the poem and, anyway,
isn't the one in the poem, if untrue,
truly untrue:
I know what he means:
he wants to write by the voice, to
separate out the distinctive
in himself, a distinctive, and write to it:
that is not the way, the way
is to say what you have to say
and let the voice find itself
assimilated from the many tones and sources, its
predominant and subsidiary motions
not cut away from the gatherings:
but that is passive, he says:
no, I retort (for effect), it is passive
to do the bidding of the voice you have
imagined formed: freedom engages,
or chooses not to, what in the world is
to be engaged

4

if nature could speak
would it have something
to say right where it says nothing:
that is, be like me, reticent,
patient, waiting and slowly the
progressions will find progressive gears
(even now backsteppings are being wound
forward) and the wind seek key other
than the eaves-key: nature would say,
be still, that is to say, indifferent
like me, only to say so would
motion difference:

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probably this is why nature says nothing—
it has nothing to say

5

knowledge, perception, this action
is so endless it might well be
avoided, as one does not care to take
down just because it happens what happens, the play
of light on an inlet, bay, sea:

worked so far in, knowledge mingles
with its source
so as to give up reefs, shoals, shores
of resistance, to unwind
the embracing curvatures of line,
shelf, lagoon

recalcitrance, fluency: these:
too far with one and the density
darkens, the mix slows, and bound
up with hindrance, unyielding, stops:
too far with the other and the bright
spiel of light spins substanceless
descriptions of motion—

always to be held free this way,
staggering, jouncing, testing the
middle mix,
the rigid line of the free and easy

6

there is no tedium, apparently, to
mere things in eternity: sunset,
now underway with rosy ruffles,
deep glows becoming space effects,
all that, so fresh and vanishing,
so old, the sun itself simultaneously
setting and rising continuously

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on this or that sea or mountain range,
gorilla troop or small nation: Lord
God, I cry out (hear me), hear us:
but the Lord God changes before our minds
and becomes a listening device
four warps and a reach (woof) deep into
space: we cry out, bending an umbrella
of focus His way to penetrate
nothingness, signals, arbitrary, noticeable, intelligible

7

some branches, the
birch's, end bushy
but the squirrel,
no aerial rail to catch, will
leap into the vague
net and, bounding, find
route to hard wood

8

we went for a raw walk in the
high middling of the afternoon, the
wind getting into and up our coats
and even gently into our pants:
nevertheless, we would not be daunted,
the rain also, though sparsely and
smallishly, prickling us, it being
forced forward stingingly by the gusts:
the evergreens and clouds rolled:
we heard the tough, rattling burr of
highwind in the hardwoods and the softer muffle
of cedar boughs: we noticed the
forsythia standing half-out: we
noticed the honeysucklebushes filled
with tiny green lotus temples where last
week ice had hung cold-dry or rattled loose:
Bernie said he wasn't much interested
in nature but if we didn't have it we'd have to
think of something to take its place

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9

cauliflowers are either real or
illusory, ditchbanks shed inward into their
courses old cattail fuzz, fern
fiddleheads, sporophyte flimsy either
appearance or verifiability:
gravy runs down the chin and forms
brothy drops that can't or can favor stain:
why test mind on the reality stone:
nothing will be determined but that
mind, too, terribly flows and stalls, holds
and gives way: if you don't
eat the imaginary potato (grown in an
imaginary field, baked in an imaginary
oven) your real capacity
to imagine illusion lessens:

hug thighs to thighs, sit broken with clarity
of delight at children
in the early afternoon sun, hold
on to some specification of curvature
the "flavor" of a mind that once informed
a loved face, let nothing vanish that has not
proved out a firm roundaway

miss the kingdom of feelings
or find it too much and it is
indifferent who made the world or what
it was made of, stone or vision

10

the clumps and small reservoirs of
snow (as in forks of big trees where
honeysucklebush sometimes starts or
moss or fern finds aerial pond)
are gone and no rain
worth troubling the soil has fallen
lately: the early morning brook is dark,
its rock shale bottom showing through,

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the water dawn-clear at last, filtered
black diamonds: the stump of a giant
dutch elm stands by: its bark warps
off in swales of curvature: splits
enter radially closer
and closer to the heart: the meat
mush-sodden feeds mushrooms, big
whiteheaded, and brackets respond
vigorously to the softening:
various mechanisms appropriate,
necessary, useful, even beautiful
will do away with it in time and then
the mechanisms will find other work,
earth's supply of dutch elm stumps run out

11

rather than the play of the mind as
wind on tidal or other creeks or
streams or even runlets developed in
gravel by macadamways, why not
dwell the mind on mushrooms till the several
kinds define themselves, select their habitats,
go through a few life cycles, and reach their
roots into where they come from and
of what and how they go and get
back from there: attend to mushrooms and
all other things will answer up:
while if you flick off (leaping like light)
all the scallops of a broad scape to keep it
noted and active, you may not in your own
summaries add much up

12

how to exclude the central,
exclusive reductions, the narratives
that consume the environment
transparent into their symmetries:
how to get out into the looser

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peripheries where the roots of
specific trees hold them away from
the maelstrom and birds
have occasion to fly: but, of
course, not too far out, away, from
the controlling knots

everything is established, even all
the motions: even the revolutions
turn with the gears of necessity
and even the little motion that
gets away into some lost or possible
refiguring is figured on: there is
no cause for alarm: and no joy except
in buying everything

13

I like the ridge, its rolls my fixed ocean:
not *my*, I don't own an inch of it:
and not theirs, either, the ones who
do own it, for they don't see it or
their part in it:
I'm part of the ridge they see in the
east, their morning place: nearly in
the height of the summits around here
I see the sun come out of flat
land, nearly, lingeringly interfered
with by ordinary trees: for evening
though the sun has gained space over
the lake, its setting among trees
no more than fuzz from here: it
encounters rockswales sharp on:
fire and stone flare together and the fluid
yields and sinks past, burning, darkened, out:
but I like the ridge: it was a line
in the minds of hundreds of generations
of cold Indians: and it was there
approximately then what it is now
five hundred years ago when the white

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man was a whisper on the continent:
it is what I come up against:
it regularizes my mind though it has
nothing to do with me intentionally:
the shows that arise in and afflict
nature and man seem papery and
wrong when wind or time tears
through them, they seem not only
unrealistic but unreal: the ridge,
showless, summary beyond the trappings
of coming and going, provides a
measure, almost too much measure,
that nearly blinds away the present's
fragile joys from more durable woes

14

I've had all the apples out of my
basket (or tossed them out, whole
or spotty-rotten) I couldn't
wait to see the empty basket,
light, structurally transcendent:
but some mornings I get up and can
make nothing of it: it is empty:
I fall into it and vanish: other
mornings it is the very starvation
I have longed for so long to chide
and mock the world with:

but then it is a wastebasket and I
put it out to the use of the world:
it collects trash of the thoughty:
others (the litter litterers) give
theirs to the wind, the chance and
random boys: but I don't think
there's much distinction between
saved and spent trash: trash is what
you make of it: if you throw it away
you are rid of the problem—unless

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a little bit is waiting to greet you
your next day round: and there is
no away, of course, finally to
throw anything away to

15

considering mutability and muck,
transforming compositions and
decompositions, ups and downs, comings
and goings, you have, sir, passed
from a thousand orifices, some
beneath you on the evolutionary
scale: visibly moved, the gentleman
got some roll-on ban deodorant
and tried to rub me off (or out):
shit sticks: its fragrance in the old
days confirmed the caveman he was coming
home: a man's shit (or tribe's) reflects
(nasally) the physical makeup of the man
and the physiologies of those others
present, plus what they have gathered
from the environment
to pass through themselves

the odor of shit is like language,
an unmistakeable assimilation of a
use, tone, flavor, accent hard to
fake: enemy shit smells like the enemy:
everything is more nearly incredible
than you thought at first

16

nature that roots under us
thrusting us up and out
flows through assembling
us but eventually
the structures of the mouth

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crack down to incontinent corners
moist, the eyes weeping
air's mere burn

(the waste in a woods gives
off the best heat and brightest
illumination: all growing is
gourd green: but the fallen
lie about dry and light, lightwood,
ready at a click of fire to
rage response, its fast undoing its
best revelation)

flows through
taking us apart, returning fine knots
to recycling's fuzzy frays
and chunks: can we not,
then, find in these majestic
necessities
room for consideration,
notice of the sacred, an
overriding working steady
in care and keeping: look
elsewhere or go on paying close attention

sap, brook, glacier, spirit
flowing, these are sacred but
in a more majestic aloofness
than we can know or reason with:
we can participate in it only
imaginatively, even as we are
assembling to prevent the giving
way under us: a sacredness above
the sacredness we needed, which
would direct some arc, preferably
a towering tower, some band or
quality of concern to
recognize us here in the
first case, being concerned,
different by that concern

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but we should not expect
easy sacredness that
turns aside to us when we wish
and leaves us alone to whole joys: we should
expect that the sacred, too, will
try, elude, abandon us
so as to show something
high to realize, recalcitrant,
unyielding to makeshift in
its quality, something we could
miss altogether even while it
sustained us throughout until the
carrying off or away

we assemble the variable materials until
balance begins
defining out, then we explore the
validity of the balance, collecting and
testing in cooperation with it, then
its fullness approaching satisfactory
disposition, we test it down to see if
it can give or crack: if it holds we
come into a high, intricate consideration
of the balance, the branches and
embranchments so fine, the recalcitrant
solidity of the mass or number and
justice begins to appear, the distance
that lets the wolf run and kill and the
caribou mosey on: starved crows
showing up for hide shreds: the wolverine
cagey, careful, capable on the
periphery of astonishing kills:
snow eaten for blood salt: so
many things to consider, undoing so
unlikely, assent follows, the wide band
of the mind shifting to acceptance,
finding the staying place amid
horror, lust, need, necessity, that
which is, a small
place to walk in a system of others

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17

we live again in the bellies
of worms, fly again (?) with
winged worms: we come sponging
back to the tables of our children
to be swatted: since this
is one place,
going is coming, ending beginning,
individual shape shed
like exoskeletons of spiritual flies

18

I go to nature not because
its flowers and sunsets speak
to me (though they do) or
listen to me inquire but

because I have filled it with
unintentionality, so that I
can miss anything personal in
the roar of sunset, so that

I can in beds of flowers hold
my head up, too: whereas,
the forms of intention, the
faces swept chill-firm with conviction

can assemble and roll down
streets and declare divisions
that save or kill: I go to
nature because man is scary,

his mercilessness not like
the jaguar's which can be evaded
but like one's own mercilessness,
inescapable as one's own intellect

and devising, the mercilessness
from which there is no appeal

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19

I wouldn't give up a hair of
the beautiful
high suasions of language,
celestial swales, hungering the
earth up into heaven, no,
I would just implicate
the language with barklike beeps,
floppy turf
of songsound, I would lift up so much
of the whatnot
it would pull the heavens down
commingling with things and us

I would give up nothing
if I had my way: I would just
idle a belt or two of trees over here
a while and turn aside a river or
so there, and keep a few continents
waiting a second, and I would
go from one thing to another until
I had the impression I could tell what
was going on and I would sing it all
up, like lassoing, and tie it down

20

when the hand falls apart it makes
a handful of bones, a
spill or smallest cairn: no matter
how much the hand taught
of love or how many times it flew
upward to catch the raiments of heads
of hair or how busy it seemed in water
quick fish or how it was the strongest
shoal many a death could reach or how
much it seemed to assume the forms of
its tasks
here it is now a fact, neutral,
plain, open for inspection, the cutest

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collection, a peak white as a
peak tip, take some into your hands,
take them with you, hold them up to the light
to see, roll them, throw them,
conjure up the wind's chances with them

21

heaven can be as purified as your
consciousness demands, I suppose, but
think of a heaven with people only in it,
gorillas missing, not worthy of soul,
but if all things are soulful and kept
why then will we meet as well as our
old friends the chickens we've killed
and/or eaten, sows and piglets, shoats
and boars and other animals, quite
an extensive catalog in our freezers and
refrigerators, will they be there grunting
at us or, indeed, rushing
us, gobbling our souls up

22

once you've caught the notion,
perceived the evidence, raked it
up, sorted through it, the recurrent
from the fortuitous, meanwhile casting
out the merely repetitious, bundled
sortings up, clumped certain ones into
bags, tied strings around the bags,
heaved the whole business up on your
shoulders and jostled around till
you've found the balance point in
it—what an amazement
as you stand there searching stillness,
not yet having decided where to go
with it all, if anywhere, to realize
that the balance, the point of

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balance, is a found piece of permanence
in the disposition of things (look how
many *of*'s), a still place, primordial
form, and that every shiftless thing
it took to find
the point is mere change's shifting

23

slice thirty degrees off the summer
summit eighty and the windy ridge
that's left can change your summer
clothes: it's April and
glory is still uncertain and death
not:
    the air is so clear and the
    sky fine blue this morning,
    small showers having given
    fringes to the front coming
    through last night:
a V of about forty geese, late,
and working nearly into the NW
wind, struggled through, haggling:
I've seen geese that waited early
for the right high wind go over
like they were skating, the wings'
strokes covering apparent distances
(real distances, but not real air
distances) only gliding could acct for

24

last year we got this strawberry
jar, a ceramic bulge-bellied vase with open
ears all around it and a strawberry plant
growing in each ear: winter came and I
put the affliction in the garage where
naturally the temperature fell below
zero, though sometime during the day

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the window found a ray that caught
the jar (not warming it much): the leaves,
cold-scorched quickly dead, remained green
all winter but when put out this
spring turned burnt brown, you can just
imagine:
  this story is too short for a long
    story and too long for a short story:
    anyway, today I observed two green serrated
    feelers oozing up into each of two ears
    and thought to my self "my word"
the plants didn't die: by then, that is
by this morning, since I had thought the
plants dead and stopped watering them,
the jar was shrunk dry: so I went to
get the plastic wateringcan that has
been sitting all winter under the outside
faucet catching, since thaw, drops: leaks:
I noticed last fall's leaves in the
can and thought well that will improve
the juice but I thought it did smell
funny: I poured water into the jar-top
and most of it, drought-refused, ran over or
out: so I waited for the soak to take and
began to think something really
smelled: I poured some more rich brown
juice into the jar and then upended
the can to let the leaves fall out and
out plunked this animal clothed in
leaves so I couldn't tell what he was
except his thick tail looked thicker
than a rat's: mercy: I'd just had
lunch: squooshy ice cream: I nearly
unhad it: I expect the crows will come
and peck it up, up, and away, the way
they do squirrels killed on the
streets: pulling at the long, small
intestines and getting a toehold on
small limbs to tear off the big flesh

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25

the rat was a mole: the arctic air
yesterday afternoon dried him out and
the freeze last night stiffened him much
reduced in size and scent: so
I broke out the shovel, dug up a
spade, dumped in the mole: there let
him rot, the rat: I can see how
something blind could get into my
wateringcan: but with those feet!
I can hear him scratching up the side:
to get in, or out: but also I can hear him
sloshing, the blind water darkened by
night, till nobody came

26

there is something about
a redbird flying down
into
the brook bed, the stone-deep ditch,
and lighting on a washed-out root,
the brook meanwhile throwing mirrors
everywhere—light, mirror, bird, stone

27

I like, as I have said before,
maximum implication and

registration of fact and tension before
integration catches on as to how

it is to work and the point it
catches on to the finish what a war

between what will and will not be
captured by design, bent to a larger

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rule, made to serve, expand, elaborate:
it is not right until the design

at once insists on itself and accommodates
itself to the material all the way out

to the tricky coincidental! for if
the central, controlling design will

not submit to the chippy alteration of
the surprising appearance, the fortuitous

bit, its control will be perfect, a
nonplace, emptiness: but the integration

that tests itself, adjusting, sorting,
out to the limit why it holds because

there is nothing to loosen it, garrisons
and amassings of questioning having
meanwhile overturned the perfect

28

it doesn't matter to me if issues
overload a line:
or if real poetry shrugs sucking
bugs of small intentions
off the shoulders of its purer
streams—what the fuck—everybody
has to eat, nature overfilling
everything to fill it:
yesterday was one day, today is
another, tomorrow still one more:
the creeps:
the sun is bright but can never
squint fine enough to count time
by my span:
it is unavailing: everyone knows

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that when we die we wake up
elsewhere from the dream life into
life, hop over a fence and
walk off across nobody's pasture

29

I wake from a nap
in a room I have worked
so many hours and years
in, made long poems &
dinky ones in, read and
answered letters and
thrown some out unread
or unsent and I cannot
remember ever having been
here before, this place,
the woods
out the window, what does
it mean, and then I recall
a trace, but nothing I
couldn't throw away, and
that trace fits with a
recent time that blocks
out into fullness of
being and then the walls
settle, the house
takes disposition
with the street, the
town, oh, yes, the lake, ridges,
I yawn a couple of times
and pick up the latest
thing to do

30

words cast up
to see if light
will pick anything out in them

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like sand and trash
a winnowing:
though I cast up true

words as far as I know
(words that truly
occur) I cannot be

held wrong when I range
into winnowing chaff,
truly chaff: I am

seeing: I am looking to make
arrangements: is the land
rich, are the children

well, the mind, is it
well-stocked and with what,
fish: has a grain

of hope or grain been
found: is there, going
this way or that, any

increase in increase or
any falling off: is, at
this time, any direction

worth finding: I said
the words in the time
of themselves: I said the

words as truly as I could
say them, according to
themselves: the words

are not responsible: they
are not the truth: they

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caught the swerve, they

revealed the glint: the
mind opens—it is so
delightful, glaring—many

times before it finds a
room worth finding:
but chaff will show

you "which way the wind
blows" truly: my words
are, of course, chaff

as assertions are:
but the motions: as
the wind blows, so blows

the world: in the
innerwork of the
motions one reads what will

be aright and turns here or
there as he can (ashcan) to get
away or be there with it:

I speak to show not
the substance but
the curvature of the going

the substance may change often
but the curvature has a glacial
pace, seeming, to tell the truth,

out of kilter with substance:
but probably, though we can't
wait too long to see, it comes
out right eventually

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31

I was this
morning affrighted past loafing
by the small blood
lining the squirrel's mouth
where he lay on the highway's edge
his legs spraddled stiff into space
the high eye full of the morning sun
the other
scrinching wide open on grainy macadam

oh, me, I said, myself affected, cars
are our worst predators
getting more
than crows can hawk (hocking &
spitting) into shreds even
(though it's good
that some things clear things away—
in the old caves
dying men
shoved into backroom fissures, split trenches,
found quickened way to rigid ease)

a young couple bicycling came up the
hill past the squirrel and though the
girl's eyes cast it a slight shake
her talk didn't break and they went on
by with the tribute of being glad to get
by:

the car itself, the kill recent, had
gone on, notifying no one—why notify,
or how, a different species: we never
tell mules we're dead, though they say
Uncle Asa's great-horned owl knew the
afternoon, changing, he died because his
hooting skirled or whatever and he

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wouldn't stop moaning, the thriving
throat croak, and dogs out under the
lean-to's of barns know when their
masters lie dying

32

today Jerry, Fran, Phyllis and I went
to see the high farm out by Mecklenberg:
the farm starts high and keeps getting
higher: the brook runs way up and
on the way is the low pond but further
up, the larger high pond and then
there are a couple of fields of
ascension and then the old woods of
the ridge, precipitous in climb, not
available to hassling lumbermen:
along the ridge is a long march
you don't have to sweat once you're
there: wild turkey, deer, grouse
inhabit the inaccessibilities and make
do: I would buy a whole 130-acre farm
for one hermit lark, his song,
especially his song at evening by a
pond: right now there are some shabby
sheep, eight cocks (henless): I heard
one cock crow, a sound I've been as hungry
for as the lean throats of cockerels:
one dog, the master not around, three or four
scrubby cattle: an apple tree a hundred
years old looking better in spring
leaf than the house a hundred years
old: it's got so the only place you
can appreciate won't appreciate: the
silence was ineluctable: I heard it
& heard it: it reminded me of the
ground: noise is motion: silence
deepens down and picks up ground
boulders and deepens down to springwater

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33

I'm split but not
in two, I bough
into ramification,
I break out into
peripheries of leaf,
mist informs my
rondures: I go more
than halfway one way
and crosslash back
away: my
splits overlace:
the complication
strengthens me,
interweaving my
fragmentation, so
that I include
in a sweep of singleness
as much singleness
as one needs and
more than enough
sweep

34

don't think we don't
know one breaks
form open because he fears
its bearing in on him
(of what, the accusation,
the shape of his eros, error,
his guilt he must buy
costing himself)
and one hugs form because
he fears dissolution, openness,
we know, we know:
one needs stanzas to take
sharp interest in and
one interests the stanza

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down the road to the wilderness:
life, life: because it is
all one it must be divided
and because it is
divided it must be all one

35

wherever mortality sets up a net
or responsibility's strictures harden
I mount into a whirlwind and
buzz off, clearing a streak
I spend the night in sonnets but the
next morning pack my bag with free verse
the road is my winding song sheet
the rivers, branches, brooks purl
my uneasy pleasures:
leaving everything behind, I stick to
nothing
I will not hear the terms of arraignment
or appear in the marble courts
I will not bear the sophistry,
subtle ramification, of the arguments
for and against:
yet the guilt sharp as jails has gotten through:
the air dissolves and absorbs,
oceans dissolve and absorb,
the imagination changes things
whose change, the hell of things, comforts me

36

straitened narrow, river-wound
through the pass, bluff walls misty
with moss-like trees,

doing what is worth doing is worth
what doing it is worth
but doing what is not worth doing
that can really be worth doing

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often when one is denied access
to reality
imagination will rise to the occasion
and body
forth the vivid thing as if itself
so the deprived
may be given all but touch of the
form, color, line

or will produce the very presence of
the thingitself itself but with
shadowy reservation to please the mind
but not the solid body

lawn full of goldfinches eating
dandelion seeds, the headful whipped
over, held by a perchfoot—the yellows
nearly interchangeable

37

everyone watches the world end once
or if one is asleep
the roots of his dreams loosen and
brain soil crumbles down the slopes
or if a coma has risen right into the
shallowest waters of awareness
why then the world may as a skim of light end

38

I don't care if I don't tell the truth
the she-spider hangs to the ceiling
of the backporch as if, dead since last
November, alive: by her hang five
egg sacs, waiting: the she-spider
flares there, dead and dry, guarding still:
or I don't care if I tell the truth
the way the struck squirrel in his fifth
day by the roadside begins with perfect

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accuracy to advertise his whereabouts: the truth
is none of my business: I don't care if
I tell a little: my business is to make
room for the truth, to bust the couplet,
warp the quatrain, explode the sonnet,
tear down the curvatures of the lengthy:
the truth is commodious, abundant: we
must make a room so sufficient it will
include till nothing will be left
over for walls, merely the thinning away
to the numb, great vacancy visible

39

in the small walks & chasms
of despair one seeks to find and
pretends to build enledgments to
plateaus of staying and view but
these unfound, pretended become high
lake surfaces of chagrin, false, of
course, in themselves but,
worse, too brilliant for common use

40

the honeysucklebushes already weighty
with new leaf and blossoms can hardly
bear the most recent foliage, snow:

the branches separate in the dome and
fall all ways, in the angle of falling
catchment for snow amply provided,

the bent bent, the bush crushed,
a great ground flower:
the desert

mouse twitches under the rule of the
rattler flash or owl appearing unheard:
and

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the rattler under the flare of the
redhawk which destroys the head first,
plucking out eyes and tongue: how

worrisome the yew-snow to the
she-cardinal, all day yesterday,
Sunday, stirred from her nest by boys playing

basketball, here this morning greeted by
another hassle: I hardly believe I don't
have to teach this morning: the first

Monday off: snow, free to draw winter
lines in the stickwork of tree and bush
inconvenienced inconveniences the midMay

boughs, so full and thin, catchy:
problem solvers subsidized with subsidies
and grants approach solutions but artists
dwell penniless with the central problem

41

we were talking about our MFA program
(pogrom) in Creative Writing when I said

should we, can we, professionalize
delight

and what better way to point up need
than by the superfluous

I said something like that, others
were saying other things, like why

not teach creative seeing or theory or the
voice of tone, or point-of-view

what I said was disrespectfully inane
and consequently useful to those

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needing an angle offsight to true
up against, the clearing into range

of a blur: by the time my blur had
taken on the definition of balanced

variations and compromises it was
no longer delightful, and I turned

down everything clear, arranged for
small game: I do not care to hunt

if I cannot be run over by
an elephant or flushed out of the bushes

by an inquisitive lion or buttressed
with speed from the rear by a forward

waterbuffalo: I wouldn't want to kill
anything innocent unless it had

weaving in ranks before it a ridge of
cobras or dashing crocodiles: my

walking stick, I hope I said how it
makes me feel wooden about the

shanks when I go walking and dogs zoom
out to brag on their teeth: but it is

the very thing to challenge a dog or
man to violence: and if a man snatched

it away, it would become his weapon,
so effective and sufficient, against

me: what was said on this subject of
swords works for walkingsticks as well:

the moral nature of the North is such
it is considered indecent to be decent:

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united we stand, divided we sit down:
once a month about I put everything

away, stickeraserbrush, paper, drafts,
inks, watercolors, clips, everything

away, clean up my room and walking out
declare, I am done with creativity,

only to discover the next day or hour
that everything cut down to

creativity everything goes with
that: I cut the grass, take up or

put in tulips, consider puttying up
the windowpanes, hack off some live or

dead branches here and there—but
come back to creativity and break

out all its gear again and set to
doodling: thank the Lord: home is

where the doodle is: today cleared
so bright blue one felt the offer,

this is it, take it, and trying to
take it found no way to do so: today

was a complete chance, a chance at the
complete, the adequate satisfaction:

how painful beauty is that gets away
full and unbesmirched and how comfortable

the rainy day that publishes your
lesser failures: life is roundabout

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and roundabout and we are, with ups
and downs, linear: the round goes on

but we break in and out: the squirrel
killed 11 days or so ago, chucked off

the road by crow or cop, was chucked
back but right on the road's edge,

by the man cutting his lawn: several
days were cold and nothing touched

the squirrel and then the snow filled
his ear and tallied his tail out to

the feather bone: so he
is doing pretty good but the old

killing is still sketched on his face
and one wishes for the warm days,

the worms rising up under him and
draining him off into flight: I have

mourned him so many times I grow angry
at his self-ful staying on: disditches

42

minutiae is a fussy word
matrix is too perfect
often is often mispronounced
irregular suggests constipation
irregardless is one of those things
mucous is the nastiest slick on la lange
I like strut as in strutted veins
varicose moleways
  some people say they don't like

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thought flowing through illustrative
images (they can't catch much)
they prefer to dwell in one place into
revelation unsuspected

everybody these days mixes up
lie and lay and mispronounces forehead

43

the high farm beseeches my mind,
thought, my mind soars up the hard
climb to the ridge but then
feels the backing of the ridge
to the sweep, the high passover
so laborious, everything under it
gentled, the still ponds, swallows
plinking them with fine lines, flies
spinning to burr shook into the surface
tension, nipper fish catching a
chink in the mirror informative as
a web: the earth is so fearful
and beautiful! ticks, mites,
flukes, spilldiddlings from the
assholes of filthy sheep—O
troubled shepherds—
I love nature especially if there's
a hospital nearby and macadam or
glass in between: or
the way it survives as cuttings
or seedlings in claypots or plastic
furrows cut off from the true ground: how
our forefathers hated woods and sex,
so much of both to deal with,
cut down or back: but now the
coonyus surrounded by taming
equations of the pill, the sperm
rage, such a wilderness, shot wild,
why we can horse deeply in with
irresponsibility's ease: that's what

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they say: I'm afraid nature's going
to send the bill: it usually does:
ferocious tallywhacker

44

sweeps of space haunt the slopes,
the ridge starved to the wind that
skins it: boulders like springs
spill winter's coolth, residuals:
stones will not have warmed to summer
before frost cuts back: brook
stones cast shadows underwater,
deep in small falls' flow holes:
upland marshes, flow-slows, in them
logs idle, fallen den trees, turtles
big and little angle up the ascents
and sun a chill that won't come off

45

the thought that
so much is not wasted but is
the wellspring
of the tight usages we take
and spill! downridge from some spot
any way is ten miles, so much beneath
one one feels the invitational
unlidded, the not-held-down:
what smart fright! dive into the
fringes of houses on dirt roads, and
then paved narrow roads, and then
the main arteries, flowing a lot more
quickly, to the holding spleens of
towns by lakeshores low as you can get

46

culture, hardened to shellac's empty
usage, defines in definitions

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hoaxdoms of remove from the true life
which
is smaller, leaner than a brook, no
louder, variable as, to the true rain:
the true life feels about its small
shoulders the traces and burdens of
death and turns for relief to berries,
bushes bent in abundance,
to dives into fell pockets of streams,
to musings on the clean forward edging
of the moon, to the eye of the other,
consolation, what there is, in the small
humbling touch

47

peeling the bark off a crabapple
cane, the purplepink woodskin, I heard
the loud oriole overhead in the maple
(looking for worms, I bet—we don't
have many this year, wonder why that
is, last year he could have opened
his mouth and a
bellyful would have crawled in, instead
he searched bough on bough, flying
and emitting scarves of music in
between, and never I think found a
thing)

worms ending in song

(except in the oriole's case one would
just as soon they didn't)

48

at dusk rabbits settle
out of the air and crop
the plumequill stems of blown dandelions
nibbling them up like drunk drinking straws

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and then in the most delicate, short-range
leaps get over to the quince leaves
and trim the bush hind-leg high

49

little showers yesterday evening, quiet
as rabbits emerging into dusk to feed,
darkened the macadam except where

overhanging shower-holding trees drew their
negatives in dry ground: but this morning,
fog has built up drops in the branches and dripped

wet images of trees on ground otherwise dry:
needles and leaves collect until
their points bulge to drop and then if

the wind riffles a small shower will erupt
and rustle: fellow said he was so weak he
couldn't throw a shadow: maybe fog has

the multiplicity to deal with pollen, that
is, touch it in the air, grain to mist-drop,
and bring it down: but

on the first breeze that stirs
under a lifted fog, weavements and
shimmerings of pollen unlace

50

a light catches somewhere, finds human
spirit to burn on, shows its magic's
glint lines, attracts, grows, rolls
back space and dark, stands dominant
high in the midsphere, and reality
goes into concordance or opposition, the
light already dealing with darkness
designating it darkness, opposition by

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naming, and the intensity of the source
blinds out other light: reason
sings the rightness but can do nothing
to oppose the brilliance: it dwells:
it dwells and dwells: slowly the light,
its veracity unshaken, dies but moves
to find a place to break out elsewhere:
this light, tendance, neglect
is human concern working with
what is: one thing is hardly better
or worse than another: the
split hair of possible betterment makes
dedication reasonable and heroic:

the frail butterfly, a slightly
guided piece of trash, the wind takes
ten thousand miles

51

I like nature poetry
where the brooks are never dammed up or
damned to hauling dishwater or
scorched out of their bottoms by acids:
the deep en-leafing has now come and
the real brook in certain bends dwells, its
stone collections dry-capped, shale shelves
in shade, leaves and falls murmuring
each to the other—and yesterday I
looked upbrook from the highway and
there flew down midbend a catbird to
the skinny dip, found a secure
underwater brookstone and began, in a
dawnlike conclave of tranquility, to
ruffle and flutter, dipping into and
breaking the reflective surfaces with
mishmashes of tinkling circlets.

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ROGER ROSENBLATT

Preparations for a Journey

THE LAST CHILD I SPOKE WITH was Trinh, though she did not see me at first, and I, at first, did not address her. I was preoccupied with the priest, and she with Hong Kong Island. Standing quietly by herself on a corner of the pontoon, she stared open-mouthed across the blue harbor at the silver office buildings pressed tight against Victoria Peak in whose windows the sun seemed to burn. There were no such astonishing towers in Haiphong, the home Trinh had left thirty-five days earlier, with her mother, her brothers and sisters, and the priest. In all there had been fifty-one aboard, most of them belonging to the Catholic community of Haiphong. Although they had been stowed in holds intended for fish and the junk had nearly sunk three times, theirs had not been a harrowing voyage, as these voyages go. Trinh showed none of the scars of other boat children, no boils or bald patches. Indeed, she looked so alert and rested, you would have thought she had come to greet the junk, instead of having sailed on it.

They had started out from Haiphong on September 13, one day before I began my own journey. In the time between then and October 18, the date of their arrival in Hong Kong, they had traversed the South China Sea, and I half the world, having stopped and traveled in Northern Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, Thailand, and now Hong Kong. My purpose was to write a story for *Time* Magazine on children growing up in the world's war zones. I went to Thailand to meet Cambodian children, who were located in refugee camps there, and to Hong Kong to talk with the Vietnamese. This hot, bright Sunday would be my last day in that city. On the pontoon the new arrivals squatted and huddled together under a tent made of shirts in order to keep the sun off. They sipped water from an orange plastic bucket which they passed from hand to hand, and gazed straight ahead, as if posing for a family photograph. Behind them their junk bobbed crazily in

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the harbor, giving an idea of how it must have rolled in open swells. By evening they would be processed by the Hong Kong immigration authorities, and I would be on my way home to New York.

For the moment there was eight-year-old Trinh, ogling her new world, paying no attention whatever to the gawkers in pleasure boats who circled the pontoon, peering at the strange people. Perhaps we looked like news. Beside the American with the yellow writing pad, there was a photographer festooned with cameras and long lenses, and a Vietnamese interpreter. The photographer, Matthew Naythons, had been my guide and companion both in Thailand and Hong Kong. The interpreter, Le Ba Nhon, a former Nationalist civil servant who was imprisoned by the Viet Cong, had himself escaped from Vietnam some months before. The three of us formed a shifting triangle around the priest and the children, Matthew taking pictures, I asking the questions I had been asking for five weeks by then, about death, hate, revenge and forgiveness.

Then, with Nhon's help, I called to Trinh. In an effort to put her at ease, I told her how lovely she looked in her yellow barrette. At that she turned to me, her face suddenly drained of the enthralled expression it had borne a few moments earlier. Slowly her eyes filled with large, bulb-shaped tears. "She is self-conscious," Nhon explained. My blunder. Rapidly I tried to recoup.

"Trinh," I asked. "Why are you crying?"

The girl looked away. "I am crying for my father who is home in Vietnam."

When Trinh started to cry, so did Nhon. Nhon had left his young wife and three-year-old son behind when he fled Saigon. When Nhon started to cry, so did Matthew. When Matthew started to cry, so did I. To that point I had not cried once on the trip, nor had I ever felt the urge to do so, in spite of seeing and hearing things that might justify tears. Compared with the sorrow of most of the other children I met, Trinh's was minor. Nonetheless, there were the four of us, crying noiselessly and steadily on a blue playful morning in Hong Kong harbor for perhaps half a minute. I cannot say why.

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Around us the boats of the harbor chugged and cruised—police boats, water taxis, sampans poled by old women in straw hats, ferries, tugs, dredges, schooners, container ships. Freighters with exotic names lay at anchor stolidly, like presiding judges. The only sound on the pontoon was that of the water lapping against it. I looked to the west. In a few hours the sun that would dip bloodshot below the horizon would come up white over my own children. I concluded that the world is round. I thought then that if anyone were to ask me what I had learned on my trip, I would tell him that the world is round.

That particular discovery was not among my aims when I first contemplated the journey. What I had in mind at the outset was simply to explore a peculiar, if obvious, circumstance: there are places in the world like Northern Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, Cambodia and Vietnam that have been at war for the past twenty years or more. The children living in these places have known nothing but war in their experience. The provisions of war—explosions, destructions, dismemberments, eruptions, noises, fires, death, separation, torture, grief—which ought to be extraordinary and temporary for any life are, for these children, normal and constant. Everything they know, they have learned in an atmosphere of wildness and danger. Everything they feel and sense occurs in a situation where their lives may be ruined in a shot.

Who are these children? What and how do they think about the world? What opinions do they hold of their parents, of adults in general, of each other? What does friendship mean to them? Honor, loyalty? How sophisticated is their understanding of politics? Do they believe in rules, in governments, in God? Who is their God? And so forth, the questions peeling off one after another as I began to see that if the answer to the first and essential question was that these are very special children indeed, then, in the process of seeking them out, one would almost be searching a separate civilization, one that showed the external marks of children everywhere, but one that also, because of its fierce circumstances, bore a resemblance to nothing but itself. It turned out that this was so. By the end of the journey I was certain that if it were possible to airlift Trinh and all the children I had met

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from their various war zones and plunk them down in a neutral place, they would recognize each other immediately.

Beyond these questions were three others, more grandiose and speculative, but which had to be asked, at least of oneself. The children I planned to seek out live in nations and regions that are important to the world's equilibrium and safety. If one reached an understanding of who these children are, could one also get a sense of the future of their countries and peoples? Also, the wars in these areas are of several types—religious, economic, civil, ideological, sectarian feuds, wars of defense, of territorial gain, wars of deep historical hatred, and combinations of these. Would the children offer a way of grasping the meaning of war not provided by military histories and theoreticians? Finally, all modern generations are made up of children of one war or another. Could I, by talking with these people, learn where and why violence grows in the heart? This question was the least likely to get answered, but it was the loudest of the lot.

All such ponderings sounded neat and clear in the beginning, but in fact the prospect of discovering anything at all on this trip was questionable. If one really wanted to determine the future of a nation or of a region, or to learn something of the nature of warfare or of violence, there is plenty to gain from grownups. Why ask children? Of all the inhabitants of an area, children are, as a class, the least informed, the least concerned about world movements or world leaders, the least attentive to the nuances of public statements and discernible trends and the other means by which one's times are assessed. The dullest grownup will usually have something useful to say about his world, even if his observations are filtered through stupidity and prejudice, whereas a child will often simply shrug away a general question, or tell you straight out that he doesn't know the answer, nor has he ever thought about the problem. Admirable as such candor is, it does not teach much, unless, like the nineteenth-century European Romantics, one is so persuaded of the innate wisdom of children that every grunt becomes a cypher.

No, the reason I thought that children might be good bets for getting at the answers to these questions was simply that children are vitally important to adults. One way or another

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most grownups wish to say something to the world by speaking to or through their children; and the children, as objects of this desire, are in quite a strong position to know what the world is like. Their great advantage is powerlessness. Posing no physical or social threat, they take and adjust to whatever is provided them. Their elders, in turn, give them everything they have to offer: love, abuse, joy, ethics, knowledge, taste, custom, fear, and, for my purposes, peace and war.

Specifically what grownups give children is themselves, varnished and unvarnished. If, for example, you want a concise understanding of the minds of certain writers, one easy way to get it is through the works that they have written to and about their children. Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," dedicated to his son Hartley, prescribes a world that Coleridge himself wanted: "For I was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim, / and saw nought lovely but the sky and stars. / But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores." In "A Prayer for My Daughter," Yeats wished his child a life of ceremony and tradition in order to safeguard her from the political passions that kept Maud Gonne from loving him, or so he wished to think. Dylan Thomas, reflecting both his own temperament and the predicament of a time that had given up on certainties, wrote "This Side of the Truth" for his son Llewelyn, in which he at once assured the boy and pleaded innocent: "Each truth, each lie, / dies in unjudging love." Anne Sexton told her baby daughter in "The Fortress" that her mother's love was likely to be the one thing in her life that would not be snatched away.

Letters from grownups to children are equally revealing, not only the stylized and formal letters like Lord Chesterfield's, but those letters that parents, particularly celebrated parents, send their children in moments of pain and anguish. In a letter to his son written from a prison in South Africa, Gandhi, who was not a doting father, let the boy know right off that he was allowed to send but one letter a month, and that he had chosen to write his son because he had important words to convey. Fathers are especially eager to advise children in letters, their wisdom emerging from mishaps of their own. "Never take a mean advantage of anyone in a transaction," Dickens wrote his son Plom. "Be not made an ass to

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carry the burden of other men," Walter Raleigh told his boy. Charles I to Charles II: "You may never expect less of loyalty, justice or humanity than from those who engage in religious rebellion." Nicola Sacco to his thirteen-year-old Dante: "Help the weak ones that cry for help."

In all such instruction, there seems something at once brave and pathetic, self-confident and shaky, that could be addressed to no one but a child. In one sense the counsel proffered is an act of contrition or conscience, the public rescue of an infant from the sins of the world or of the father. In another sense it seems a kind of seeking of forgiveness from the child himself, as if the mere gesture of addressing a supposedly unblemished mind will end in self-purification. So divorced is the child's own particular life from most of these letters, from most of the advice heaped on him in general, that the words seem soliloquies, but in fact the child's existence as recipient, as listener, is essential to the parent's purpose. This is probably why children are used as mediums in seances, because they are assumed to be good conductors, to have God's ear, to possess a passive power that is the only proper vessel for the world's truth.

Then too, parents know that they may say things to children which would sound boring and banal to their fellow adults. Grownups do not like to make fools of themselves; children make them pay no penalty for uttering clichés; grownups, in turn, take clichés more seriously than they let on to one another. Thus what appears to be the adult exercise of power over children is often the reverse. It is the child who gives the adult a reason to formulate rules of conduct, an excuse to preach—in the long run, a means of admiring himself. The child is a church, a stadium.

He is also a useful symbol, the symbolic value adults place on children being yet another sign of a child's passive power. Children are given prominent positions in parades, to make a show of continuity. Politicians kiss them, to suggest their own virtue. Children's faces fill charity posters, because the heart melts quickest at the sight of a needy child. Families of entertainers (singers, jugglers, comedians) feature children because they draw one's approval of the wholesomeness of the elders. Jesus, in a sense, was symbolized by childhood before he

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demonstrated his goodness as a man because that goodness was presumed in the mere existence of the baby. That, of course, is the essential symbol: goodness, innocence, and implicitly, redemption.

So would it be, I assumed, in the inflamed places on my journey, where war is the major industry, where all the parades, charities, politicians, artists, entertainers, and even the redeemers are involved in war. Would not the children in the war zones be used as symbols, too, lined up neatly at the heads of funeral processions, pressed close to the speakers at political rallies, hoisted high in the air by demagogues, photographed slain or wounded in order to emphasize the barbarism of the enemy? Did the children recognize their usefulness to various causes? Did they mind? Did they acknowledge that every symbol is a weapon, and thus in places where weapons are indispensable, that they were indispensable too? The fact that one would even ask such questions would be but another sign of their importance.

This power that children wield is displayed so often in novels and paintings, it is a wonder that the uses of children in art have not become more predictable. Perhaps, in fact, they have; but so mesmerized does an audience become at the mere sight of a child in a work of art that the critical mind is washed away. Movie-makers like Steven Spielberg have counted on our acritical attitude toward children with stunning success, but so did serious artists like Dickens, Twain, Gainsborough, Renoir and Velásquez. Nor does a child in art have to be good and beautiful to seize our attention. The evil or threatening child like the girl in the play *The Bad Seed*, or in *Rosemary's Baby*, or Hardy's Little Father Time, or Rabelais's Pantagruel, or the children with the electric eyes in the movie *Village of the Damned*, no matter how well or poorly they are drawn, all carry enormous quantities of dread in their bland, flat features. Done right, there is no more frightening scene in literature than a child's evil manipulation of an adult.

The best parts of the best autobiographies are the ones that deal with an author's childhood. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* is practically all about being young. The passages on growing up in *The Autobiography of Edwin Muir* are among the most beautiful in English. Children are not only important to

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adults objectively; we are important to ourselves as children. Watch anyone tell of some discovery he made as a child. He becomes rejuvenated on the spot. His eyes grow bright, the lines disappear from his forehead. It is a constant wonder to him, that childhood of his, no matter if it was spent in Mississippi or in Wales, no matter how happy or lonely or ordinary. In our heads, still playing or weeping, is the child we were. It will be preserved in place until the last moments we know, perhaps because childhood is when we liked ourselves the most, when there was the least capacity or reason for self-recrimination.

Why are we so eager to know what someone was like or looked like as a baby, except to suggest that the baby holds the key to the grownup's character? Freud did this to us, but so did Dr. Spock. The statement that everybody was once a child implies instantaneous exculpation. Even in the sixteenth century the term "childe" conferred nobility as well as youth. The Quakers called themselves the Children of Light, as other religious and political groups often call themselves the children of this or that in order to claim possession of a blessed and favored state. The passive moral power the child holds over the adult world, and which that world readily concedes, is enormous. In *The War Between the Tates*, Alison Lurie said: "To have had disagreeable parents excused one's faults; to have disagreeable children underlined them." Evil or good, the child is always a potential instrument of guilt. In a guilt-ridden age, children are tsars.

The conditions of war, as I soon learned, give a sharper, less internalized cast to the idea of adult guilt. In the places my journey included, grownups have sound, solid reasons for feeling guilty about the lives of their children, with or without their children doing anything to drive the point home. A twelve-year-old boy in Belfast who sat on a couch with his mother and pointed to the red crease where the British soldier's plastic bullet entered his jaw, said thoughtfully, when asked what he intended to do when he grew up, that he might wish to join the I.R.A. His mother, a gigantic woman with close-cropped hair, who had been nodding demurely at everything to that point, flushed deep with desperation and sputtered: "Oh, Paul doesn't mean it." Paul meant it. He had

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two different injuries to display that afternoon, one physical and the other spiritual. His mother read both properly as accusations.

It goes further still, this importance that children have for adults. The idea that Jesus should enter the world as a baby was not simply effective as symbolism; it said of Christianity as a whole that this was going to be a religion directly concerned with children. So Jesus summoned children to him, and stated that they had first rights to heaven, and that a little child shall lead. The common depiction of angels as children confirms the sanctity of youth, which is not limited to heaven or to the time of Jesus. Education, the institution on which modern societies depend for their well-being and self-esteem, is designed for children. The family, on which modern societies are supposed to depend for progress and stability, are not considered whole unless children populate them.

All this rapt attention is said to be a peculiarity of the past 200 years, and undoubtedly it is more ardent now than in the ages when children were thought of and treated like shrunken adults. Still, there was Icarus, Hyacinthus, Phaeton's boy, and the young Achilles. It was the murder of the child Itys that so sickened the gods that Philomela was made a nightingale. In order to test obedience to his laws, the Old Testament God threatened the sacrifice of children. No grownup felled Goliath. To be sure, the story of creation began with two full grown adults rather than two children, which might have been more persuasive, but Adam and Eve behaved like children, albeit dull ones. If Eastern and African myths, of which I know nothing, gave children a lesser prominence, I would be surprised. Whatever the reasons, adults take children with utmost seriousness, seriousness that may be displayed in fear, reverence, contempt or affection, but that is consuming nonetheless. In one form or other, they wish to make impressions on the young.

This is not to say that children don't see things interestingly on their own. They do, and this was a second reason to seek their feelings about the wars. But they do not see things the way we would see them were we in their place, had we the time and leisure, say, to press our faces against our windows and stare day after day at a single scene, as children do. On

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this journey I saw many children at many windows—apartment house windows, terrace house windows, bus windows, truck windows, the windows of dirt huts and tents, windows with curtains and bars, windows with and without glass. Had I asked any of the children what was out their windows, they might have described the scene, but we both would have known that that was not the true answer. What children most often do when they look out windows is simply to make a place in the world, a secure and basically unchanging place which they use for looking at themselves.

In such positions they exercise the powers of observation that make them valuable witnesses, but these powers are rarely concentrated on hard information. Ask a child at the window what is out there, and he might possibly present a picture in detail, but then, just as likely, he might not. For a thousand hours or more, on and off, he has looked at nothing but that hill, or tree, or street lamp. Somewhere in his memory he knows every line and dot of the objects. Yet in response to your question, he says flatly "a hill." It is not that he has no mind for accuracy; only that he prefers to think in abstractions and generalities. Before the journey I only dimly suspected that this was so. After it, I was convinced. Children like to deal in abstractions; they feel comfortable with them. They may draw them from the lines and dots they take in, but the process is mysterious and labyrinthine. The product, however, is usually astonishingly clear, which is why children (when they do so at all) make better witnesses to the truth than to the facts.

There was a third reason for going to children as well: children take things seriously. Grownups take things seriously too, including children, but not exactly in the way that children do. When an adult takes something seriously he expresses himself demonstratively because he wishes the world to know it, or perhaps because he wants to prove his seriousness to himself. He either writes, talks, paints or gives a speech. A child, in contrast, takes things seriously by concentrating solely on the act, whatever the act may be. Nietzsche once said something about a test of a man's maturity resting in his acquiring again the seriousness of a child at play. That is it precisely. A child in a game is a diamond cutter, a spine

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surgeon, a Wallenda. Nothing infiltrates his imagination. He is, for the duration of the game, one line.

I remember a cool white morning in the north of Israel at the Manara kibbutz. This radiant kibbutz was a shelling target for the P.L.O. in southern Lebanon, and it had been hit several times. Eddie Adams, the photographer who was with me in the Middle East, wanted to get a picture of a child playing in the cab of an old truck that had been painted pink and yellow and converted to a playground toy. The boy selected for this event was a three-year-old towhead whose face had an immense and blatant capacity for mischief. He took to his assignment with one leap, and situated himself in what was clearly a familiar position for him, behind the truck's wheel. At first the boy could not take his eyes off Eddie and his cameras, an old hazard for photographers. Eddie, a gruff and sentimental man who likes to look haggard, kept telling the boy: "Play! Play!" But the boy could not play, not on command, and especially not on exhibit. He exaggerated each gesture, and smiled too wide, quite deliberately. He knew the difference between real and false games, as did Eddie, which is why Eddie also knew that the picture would never work out. Had the boy been on his own, and Eddie been able to spy, it would have been another story. As it was, it seemed as if the grownups present were being told, politely through indirection, that one does not adulterate pure play for the sake of a photograph.

In a source of information this sense of seriousness is invaluable. It suggests that nothing is undertaken except for its own interest and worth. Children make terrible liars on the whole not because they have a more heightened sense of morality than adults, but because they pay such absolute, amazed attention to the truth that a lie becomes an insult to their sense of appreciation. It is as if they lie poorly as an apology to the truth. When they are not lying, therefore, and are thus comfortable, they usually let themselves go totally: you see, this happened, then that happened, and it was all astonishing.

Death is one of the things that children take most seriously, and this offered a particular reason for relying on children in the war zones. Not that adults take death lightly, but they do try to tame it. This is done, it is said, in order to prove that

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death is a continuous part of life, to make death easier to deal with by facing it squarely. Children are all for facing death squarely, but they do not regard it as a continuous part of life. To a child death is the archenemy of life, a thing of dread, an absolute calamity. It is the beginning of nothing but emptiness and absence, prolonged and lengthening absence, absence inching inexorably toward infinity, and with the increasing distance all the pain of acknowledging that fact doubling and redoubling.

The Palestinian girl who, at the age of five, woke up on the floor beside her dead father and her dead brothers and sisters, all dead in the dark room, shot by Phalangists in the massacre at Tel Zaatar—she would speak of death as it is. As would the Irish girl whose mother, brother and grandfather were all killed in separate, freakish incidents in the Troubles; and the eight-year-old Cambodian boy who buried his mother who had starved to death under Pol Pot; and the fifteen-year-old Vietnamese boy who was selected to be killed for food on a boat with a murderous captain; and the Lebanese boy whose testicles were blown off in an Israeli bombing raid, and who now knows a different kind of death. They would all speak of death as devastation, and none would attempt to explain or excuse it.

Finally, there was the reason offered by the existence of children themselves, apart from any gifts they possess, or from the uses adults make of them. On the one hand, children represent the beginning of life. To talk with children in war zones, where the end of life was omnipresent, seemed to promise something vital, the heightened circumstance of opposites in proximity. On the other hand, children also represent the last stages of life, as the aged are said to enter second childhood or to become childlike in their helplessness and infirmity. Would one, then, by talking with children of war, find a way into life as a whole? It seemed possible, especially in places where life was truncated and intensified.

Whatever else they may be, children are the natural inventions of adults, and one assumes, therefore, that they have a definite place in the understanding of life. On the journey I would be visiting places where children are produced to propagate a species, sect, class, religion or a nation, or simply

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to enhance the happiness of two people, or because it was the custom to make children, or because it was a tenet of moral law. In certain cultures children would be produced to assuage ancestors or to offer vessels for reincarnation. In others, they would be considered saviors for their particular civilizations. They would be treated like gods in some areas, like chattel and servants in others. Yet everywhere they would have in common the special position in the order of things that children are always given, that they have always been given, ever since the first puzzling birth occurred to the two original animals who could be called human.

Where is this place, precisely? It does not seem to be a notch in a hierarchy. More likely, it is the opposite of anything hierarchical; the place of continuity, of fluidity, in a way the center of history. That thought may be what was most attractive in the prospect of the journey, the idea of childhood not being a stage of life, but life itself, its presence proving that life is stageless and circular. To seek out children would be to go after perpetuity, and a confounding question as well. Hitler at his mother's breast. Einstein storming in the cradle. If children prove life continuous, how do they also change its courses? The question was insistent, relentless. As I proceeded on the journey, it rattled the luggage and howled in the night. There is something benumbing about these small people, something in their often-expressionless eyes that calls all the world to a respectful silence, an act of homage, at times a fear. It was that look I wished to probe, the threatening mirror of those eyes which stare at you exactly as you stare at them, and all they are is open.

These at least were the considered reasons for seeking the thoughts and feelings of children in war zones. There was one practical reason as well. Children are easy to talk to; they take every question at face value, and usually answer directly whatever is asked of them. One of the most unnerving discoveries on this journey, in fact, was that the children would answer almost any question that was put to them. No subject was too personal or painful. The shooting of a sister, the torture of a friend or of oneself; all such things, if asked about, would—with the one exception of a Cambodian girl who cannot speak yet of an incident she witnessed three years ago—

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be treated like questions about height, weight and age, and answered in calm, steady tones. This was not necessarily a sign of their comfort. The children who live with war know quite well that adults are dangerous people. They spoke when they were spoken to.

In the long run, however, none of these reasons, either practical or speculative, would have been sufficient to push me to travel 25,000 miles on one leg of a journey and 15,000 more on another in pursuit of questions that might never be answered. Nor would the love of danger, which did not at all burn in me before the trip, and does not now, although I have come to appreciate the work the senses do in states of peril. If there was a single motivating force here, it resided in nothing orderly or deliberately considered, but rather in a few visual images that are so strong, I do not need to recall them.

The first is a television news picture of an Iraqi boy of three or four, wailing open-mouthed in the middle of an Iranian bombing raid of Baghdad in the spring of 1981. The picture was only on the screen for an instant, but as far as one could see, the boy was not crying out of pain, but out of sudden and deep bewilderment. As soon as I saw him another picture came to mind. This was the famous photograph taken during the American war in Vietnam, of the Vietnamese girl, her clothes burned away by napalm, running toward the camera and us, full of terror and indictment.

A third image was also produced by a picture, a drawing in a book done by atomic bomb survivors in Japan. The book is called *Unforgettable Fire*, and indeed many of the pictures are so suffused with fire that one feels the hectic heat in the reds and yellows. But to me the memorable drawing was one in black and white, a greenish-black for the gate, and a grey-white for the child leaning against it. The gate led to a garden in Hiroshima. In the drawing the boy looks asleep, but as the artist explained in a caption: "When I approached and then touched him, I found that he was dead. To think that he might have been my own son made my heart ache."

It is my own son, my oldest child Carl, who carried the final image for me. Carl is sixteen today. The picture in my mind is of a time when he was four or so, and he asked to come with me to park the car in a garage. I agreed. The eve-

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ning was cool for August, I remember, and the city deserted. I was distracted with some problem, something I quite forget now, so I did not take notice as we began to walk to the car that Carl had not thought to wear a jacket. He did wear a hat, however, a white plastic nonsense that was supposed to be a racing driver's hat, and that seemed two sizes too small for his head; it tottered there like a leaf. Self-absorbed, I was walking a bit ahead of him. Then absentmindedly I turned and saw that he wore no jacket—no jacket in that weather? I roared with rage and ordered him to go back upstairs, that he could not come to the garage with his father because he wore no jacket.

At my eruption Carl looked forlorn, but only for an instant. Turning from me, in his white plastic hat, he walked back up the steps to the apartment house without a word of protest. I see him doing so at this moment. I rarely think of him, in fact, without seeing his back, the steps, my shame, or without considering how easy it is to abuse what we control.

To these recollections others, gathered on the journey itself, have been added since, all bearing essentially the same cautionary message. They lie heaped around me now, as I begin to try to piece the trip together—all the fragments of material spread out in a false tidiness on several tables, one long desk, a bed with purple sheets, two chairs and a piano stool. Notes and pictures hang from a huge bulletin board, ten feet wide and five feet high, a godsend for the task of organization. I pace the large Victorian room I have sublet for the effort and scan these fragments like a movie sergeant inspecting recruits. Maps, itineraries, snapshots, newspaper clippings, a dozen legal size note pads filled with my scrawl. On the long desk lies the color slide of a sculpture of a hand done by an Israeli girl in response to a P.L.O. terrorist murder. Beside it, a P.L.O. badge, the gift of a fifteen-year-old boy who defended a stronghold in West Beirut. Beside that, a bright blue airplane drawn in crayon by a Cambodian boy. The plane was to take him to France.

Encircling a cassette tape recorder, fifty cassettes are arranged in piles by country, on a brown chest of drawers. The high, soft voices of the children fill the room, all the languages eventually blending and sounding like one. Some cassettes play music: the songs of an Irish girls' chorus; a folk

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song performed by two Israeli boys; a West Bank Palestinian kindergarten shout-singing "Pal-es-teen!" One cassette produces a Khmer folk dance in which the bare feet of the children can be heard keeping time with the wooden instruments, scuffling on a dirt floor half the world away.

All here, every scrap, memento, face and name. Hadara, Heather, Khu, Meng Mom, Elizabeth and Bernadette, Nimrod, Dror, Nop Narith, Ahmed the soldier, Nabil the tennis player, the brothers Ha and Trung, Hilda the flirtatious, the beautiful Waffa, the vengeful Joseph, Lara in her mourning, Thanh in his madness, the baby Palestine, and Keith the upstanding, and Peov the tormented—all staring expectantly at the one who stares at them.

This room is on the third floor rear of a brownstone built in 1850, located on 16th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue in lower Manhattan. A block and a half east of here stands Friends Seminary, the red brick Quaker school in which I spent the years six to seventeen. Four blocks north is Gramercy Park, the green quiet neighborhood where I lived my entire childhood. My childhood is not the subject of this journey, nor is that of the children whom my memory invokes whenever I walk by the school and around the park. Yet they insist upon entering this room as spectators. Children are always keenly interested in other children, the past with the present, even the dead with the living. Some secrets seem to connect them, perhaps one of them being the knowledge that we are all, more or less, children of war.

High on the bulletin board is pinned a letter from Nhon, the Vietnamese interpreter who met Trinh with me on the pontoon in Hong Kong, and who is now in California trying to secure an exit visa for his wife and boy in Saigon. The letter, penned in black ink with a perfect hand, was written when Nhon was still in Hong Kong. It gives news of the children we spoke with, and it says that Trinh and her mother are living in Kaitak, one of the refugee camps, waiting to learn where they will be relocated. When the sun goes down here, it rises over Trinh. This is a good time of day to begin a journey, particularly when one proceeds eastward and there is a continual closing and opening of light.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

History of a Malady

Plangebant aliae proceris tympana palmis
—Catullus

I

"Others beat timbrels with uplifted hands":
Across the words a ripple drifted
As if the onomatopoeia had excited
The eyes themselves, fluttering a pulse in them:
But what, as it guttered and renewed,
The ripple did was wake one to that pitch
The body had reached already: the same
Thing would have chanced without the words:
For had I been outside, a ripple
Would have travelled across the distances
Drawing a comet-train behind it,
The patterned flashes sparking to a pulse
Till the whole field of sight
Blossomed corollas of disintegrating rays:
We live at the surface of our bodies
With only the pain to tell the presence there
Of a history whose pressure we ignored:
To follow out that history from its source
One would have needed to retreat
Turning away from life and listening
Only to the roar of blood. Today
As the migraine fluttered and then burst
In a swarm of lights, I knew the body
Had been travelling in darkness and for days
Towards this consummation in confusion
When the body's quiet and its spongey dark
Winces with neon gleams, a corridor

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In the invaded citadel where messengers
Arrive with excited and uncertain news,
With memory, beset by malady, of when
The unquestioning mind inhabited its flesh
And, moving in time and rhyme with the body's ease,
We beat the timbrels with uplifted hands.

II

Not Dostoievsky's fit and fall: gentler
Than that: yet with a violence of its own:
A velocity of the cells seizes the mind,
The speed of this flare on flare
Taking pace from the recurring nightmare
Of a week of dreams, the hurtling journey
Nowhere that, waking, one forgot. This dislocation
Between sleep and seeing, what did it mean
Save that the body had made off alone
Blind to direction—that one lacked by day
A measure of its urgency? Times are
When a superabundance of the senses
Preludes this familiar disarray. Why
Does one take no warning then
From their elation? It has occurred before
And one should know it: unknowing
Breeds another dislocation: this time
Body has not gone off alone—
One has gone with it exulting in its tone
And capabilities: the eye exults also
Finding all colours prime—the humid
Blues, the greys of dust. Forms
Now are all that they should be: a tree
With its shock of foliage sways
Precise as the flower-head of a rose,
As undeclared, too—move the glance
An inch and there is so much that is new
To be read in that unpossessable shape
That could be said now with a perfect adequacy

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Or so it seems. But one took warning
Neither from dreams nor this. One should have entered
Suspiciously this Eden of the sight
As one attends to the brittle brightness
That on a day of spring spells rain:
Instead, sharpness turns its edge
As the first distorting ripple
Starts to spread and first lights
Flare the eye, powering it to the pulse
Of rapped and clinking tambourines Catullus
Heard and trapped beating into the words.

III

Beating into the words?
Verse does not know
where malady becomes melody
nor can rehearse:

this is the gift
I did not bargain for:
I would not choose it
nor can I refuse:

circling and dancing
so it seems—
despite the double
violence of dreams and light:

this is the angel with the sword
the shining double-bladed word
a lingering at the gate
of Eden late or early.

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Above Manhattan

Up in the air
among the Iroquois: no:
they are not born
with a head for heights:
their girder-going
is a learned, at last
a learnèd thing
as sure as instinct:
beneath them
they can see in print
the newssheet of the city
with a single rent where three
columns, clipped out of it,
show the park was planted:
webbed and cradled
by the catenary
distances of bridge on bridge
the place is as real
as something imaginary:
but from where they are
one must read with care:
for to put
one foot wrong
is to drop
more than a glance
and though
this closeness and that distance
make dancing difficult a dance
it is that the mind is led
above Manhattan

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Dunnett Landing

Now we must go: the boat awaited us:
  There was no mist to hide the autumn coast
Nor any August fog: instead
  The sea, the sky, all the long shore-line
And the inland hills, with every bush
  Of bay and every fir-top, gained
A deeper colour and a sharper clearness:
  Something was shining in the air, a lustre
On water and on pasture grass—
  A northern look one must go far to find
Save at this season. A northern summer
  Gathered to its end as we sailed out
Watching the gulls arriving with the tide
  Agree to turn and sway together
Down the long slopes of air, then separate
  And plunge into the waves: fish
Through the risen waters sought the bay,
  Blind to the beaks and flashing overhead
Of great birds in the weight of their descent
  Past the stoniness of shore and the flat sea.

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T. R. HUMMER

A Fool Is a Man Who Understands Nothing But Remembers Everything

It is a long time now since the blue
Of the arc-light etched
Handprints of maple leaves
Black on the sidewalk.
There was rain.

I was a stupid man.
I did not know what it meant
That we were there together,
Did not know we were held

In the shape light makes
When it touches something.
I thought I was drunk.
It was raining, and it seemed
A drunk thing to do

To stand under trees in the rain.
I don't know what you thought
You were, not even now,
But when you touched my face

There must have been
A shadow under your hand.
There must have been light
Coming down from behind you
Or I would not remember you

Glowing that way,
Something only a fool
Would think could happen.
But I know there was rain

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On your hand, I know your hand was light
On my face. I was not
Drunk or stupid then,
But I was still a fool.
I did not reach for you.

I let you stand
Touching me, an arm's length away,
Knowing the shadow we threw
Was a shape I had never seen,

One I could change.

Love Song

Bastard, I hear, and the sweep
Of the switchblade is blue in the light
Of the cobalt spot. I see the shining
Arc of steel catch the dancer's side,
See his woman fall away and scream.

They face each other, the dancer,
The man with the knife.
Couples on the dance floor part—
The bass player stumbles,
The drummer throws down his sticks,
The saxophone is left
Playing all alone.

This is how long it takes:
The spotlight's color wheel
Has barely had time to change
From blue to red, but the black-haired
Woman has screamed for hours
When the dancer takes his hands

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Away from his belly, the middle
Of the right side, where they tell you
The appendix ought to be.
The stain, in that light colorless,
Starts to grow. I cannot stop

The music coming
Out of the horn without me,
Vibrato trembling in my jaw
As the dancer goes down on one knee—

The other man bends over him.
The light shifts red to yellow,
The blade of the knife blazes brass,
The man who holds it stands staring
At the man who kneels staring back,

And I cannot stop that music,
Though nobody touches, nobody dances,
Nobody sings a word.

Drowning: A Ghost Story

I want to see it: the window
Emptied even of starlight,
Curtains invisible—no pale
Prayer-cloth-flappings in wind—there
Is not even wind. A window in the dead

Dark: nothing anyone could see,
So I go there blind, where my mother,
A girl, lies staring,
Not knowing she stares, her eyes
The same, closed or open, the power

Of her hearing huge
In the night, grown as far

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As the river a mile away. It is deep
Summer, July. I am in the room
So quietly that she hears through me

The slow moving of water,
The current's roll breaking
On bridge-pilings, opening, closing.
She hears. She lies still.
She cannot sleep for wanting

The clap of an oar on water,
The grind of a boat-keel dragged
On the sandbar, the laughter
Of men half-drunk on the river,
Faint, their voices wordless

But known. I put my hand
Out in the blackness, touch
Nothing. I cannot see
Where the bed is. Her face
Is out of reach. All I know

Is what she will say
Years later: they will not come,
The fathers, will never drift
Downriver on the tide they bucked
Daylong in the burning

Sun of July and the joy
Of the bottle they passed in their rowing.
I know they will not come,
She will not hear them talking, parting,
Never hear the slap

Of a hand on a shoulder, the quiet
Goodbyes. It is night, it is summer,
The window is somewhere, the sound
Of the river comes through,
A long, unbroken rhythm

And maybe my mother sleeps

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Without knowing she sleeps,
Maybe she dreams
She hears the heavy footsteps
Of a man risen up from the water,

A man who would glitter in moonlight
If there was a moon, a man
Who sings to himself an old song
Of rivers, his clothes
Gone strange, full of the smell

Of where he has been—he opens
The gate, she hears him
Singing, not whiskey now on his breath,
And she strains in the dark to see him
Through the window, but there is no window,

No man, no song.
Maybe she never slept.
How can I know? In the silence
Of years, I cannot even hear
Her breathing. I am alone

In any dark place, I am a boy
Waking in the night, lungs full
Of fever and the river-water
Of asthma, I am drowning
On the sickbed in my parents' bedroom

While they sleep not ten feet away
And the March wind ticks
Oak-limbs on the window,
Invisible: someone is lost
In a slow, dark current,

But, oh, it is not me,
It has no face, no name,
It is going nowhere, and I scream
Without making a sound
Till my mother comes without waking

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To touch me. I cannot see
Her hand, but I hold to it, hold it hard
As she brings me back
To the breath that grinds in my chest,
And I am in the world, have been here

All this time to come
Dark to my mother—I am not
Even a pale radiance in this night
Before I was born: not even
The light of my knowing can show me

My mother's face.
It is only a day since her father
Took his pole and his oar to the river.
She cannot know they will never
Find even the oar. Let me tell her

Mother, you have not lost him,
Let me touch her, keep her
Out of time, out of everything
She will give up to bring me screaming
From darkness to the pure burning

Joy of my new breath,
Shining wet in the light,
Dragged up by strange hands, alive.

First Love: When It Falls

Red in the east, through the crack
In the curtain—I wake
In the room I have waked in
Every day of my life, now not knowing
Where I am. Sleep has not lost me.
Dreams have not. I look down

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At my arms, thin on the sheet,
Wonder at the shape my body

Takes on the bed. I stir, throw
The sheet back, open the curtain, stare
At the great dewy web cantilevered
From window-screen to eave, the orb-spider,
Size of my hand, hung there, black against red
Phosphorescence of dawn,
That dark eight-pointed star
Not moving, or moving so slow

I cannot see it spin.
I hear my father and mother
Speak softly, not to wake me.
I cannot hear what they say.
It is summer, I am a boy
Thirteen, awake in the strange
Dawn light, awake in the room
The world does not know I have waked in,

The room I do not know is mine.
My mother's voice in the kitchen
Has no more words in it
Than the lowing of cattle coming
From the distant field, from the pond
Where they drink dark water
Before light. I can see, in this red
Sunrise, their black shapes far

Across pasture. I know
What they are. *How do I know?* My hands
Move, touch the screen, not an inch
From the silver of web—
The spider, high on the edge
Near the roof, feels my touch,

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Raises one leg, shakes it
Free of a clinging strand,

Poises. I hear
My mother's skillet ring, touched
By a spoon. The sound is like light
Sudden on water. I remember
The rod in my hand, the silver
Arc of the fish, my father
Saying *Slow, don't jerk, give it line—*
The line, colorless, glowing

Out with the dive the fish takes
Before rising, breaking water again.
I see the shape of my hand,
Strange to me, jiggle the screen,
See the spider lift, fall from the web,
Swing out on its line, swing in
To the center, see the center shake
As my hand shakes, see

The spider hang on, black
Silhouette scrambling against
The stillness of dawn—I think
Look, I have touched
The thing! Yes, touched it
With this hand that must be mine
Because it has touched. The web
Still trembles. I touch my own

Face, feel fingers light
Against flesh, the way
My mother's hand feels
When it comes out of darkness,
And I, half-sleeping, know
She is there, I am here—but now

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It is my own hand, my own face,
And it is not sleep

I am lost in. Alone
In this room that does not belong
To me, room spun around me,
I swing suddenly free
Of the love that has held me
Still in the world, and I fall
Out, dark against dawn's glow,
Holding on to the bright thin thread

Of myself, almost nothing, ready to break.

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GAIL MAZUR

Mashpee, 1979

The elements of the day aren't in accord:
warm sun on my hair, a blue spring sky,
the scorched holly and pines.

Where the low gray house stood,
nothing but metals and charred wood.

Better if it had vanished completely,
the fairy tale where I make one greedy wish
too many: *to have things just as they were*—

and then wake, stupefied,
to an empty space.

I can't say goodbye to this litter
of bricks, the twisted frigidaire,
our blackened bathtub
that sprawls in the foundation . . .

My parents stand by the rhododendron's
ghastly lace, showing the insurance detective
their few snapshots—

On the wide screenporch
overlooking the lake,
we hung Japanese lanterns one anniversary—

the picture shows five cousins, the picnic
table, candles flaming on the gaudy cake.

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Mashpee, 1952

Dawn at the lake's edge.

In the glowing mist,
a lone fisherman—
my father—rowing in
with his catch of perch,
or pickerel, or nothing—

Or evenings, walking
in a headcloud of gnats,
the quiet road, blackberries
and wild roses, stars
waiting behind the mauve sky.

That summer, I grew into
a wide dimness, dreamt
of the family atom split,
a grandparent, or sister,
leaving, never returning—

In August, we were cooled
by the lake's breath,
listened witlessly
to a blurred radio report
of Boston's heatwave.

And friends—long dead now—
mother's friends sprawled
gratefully on the porch,
reading easy Ellery Queens,
shades down in the rooms upstairs;

and the children,
lying on the porch floor,
pooling their decks
of playing cards, played
endless games of War . . .

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After the Fire

I wake sometimes thinking, it's still there:
my father's red lumberjacket still hangs
on a hook in the back hall;

in the dining room, the veneer still
blisters and cracks on Aunt Belle's
upright piano. Dampness has made it
hopeless, forever out of tune;

a blue platter hangs above the mantle:
If music be the food of love, Play on!
it orders us in blue calligraphy
around its unglazed border.

We were so unmusical.

Dumped in the country,
the old piano was usually ignored.
Once, my cousin, visiting
from his cheerful, sensible life,
groaned at the sound,

but that night, he played us
his romantic repertoire—
Stranger in Paradise, I'm a Fool
to Want You, Tenderly—and we sang

off-key together
as Aunt Belle's piano,
getting the words
absolutely foolishly right . . .

That gleeful group of singers
must have been what my young parents
hoped for, buying a summer cottage
on the Cape right after the War . . .

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As my cousin prodded the swollen keys,
the breeze moved up from the lake,
stirring the embers in the fireplace,
this deceptive flutter of my memory,

my family standing, joined
around the ruined instrument—

It wasn't music, really,
but we played on.

Ruins

The year my father bought the place,
a forest fire burned so close
it ate the outhouse, scorched the oaks.
We came, to explore the foundations
of cottages and old estates,
sit in the charred skeletons
of a tycoon's antique Fords.

Like scholars, we sifted the absent
neighbors' residue for souvenirs—
when I found Dutch iceskates,
I felt foreign, and fictional.

The damaged wilderness was ours
those brilliant dreamy week-ends.
My mother picked Black-eyed Susans
and Queen Ann's Lace for the table.

She dug a sassafrass tree by its roots
and replanted it in our yard.
We planned to make medicinal tea,
like the Wampanoags had brewed here,
from its shiny three-fingered leaves.

That house held us so, we broke apart,
departed, one child following another

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in a fury of independence—the family,
like milkweed in autumn, finally burst
from its pod and disappeared, scattered
to other locations, dislocations . . .

Now I cross the seared lawn
to join my parents; the arsonist
hovers here with an awful presence.
Mother, Father, what's ours in this
rubble? When they come to pick *us* over,
what will they find here, what did we leave?

Mashpee Wine

The barn still stands, but barely,
the roof's half gone, the walls
curve inward, windows slanting
without their panes. The wooden
floor has rotted; I can see
the hump of sandy dirt beneath it—
nothing left to save.

I tell the builder to tear it down.

The water tower, the pump house—
the house itself—have already
disappeared, their histories
undocumented, half-understood.

Years ago, when we brought
the tower down, we found it
littered with squirrel skeletons.
I used to bring my grandfather
tall, cold glasses of that water
as he sat in the sun, waiting.
"Mashpee wine," he called it.

Was it the drowned animals
that made it so delicious?

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I'm nervous in the barn, afraid
today's the day it will cave in.
It smells of mildew, and worse;
wind tears through the holes—
it's all shadows and a bit of light.

Someone has dragged a new
kingsize mattress to a concave
wall; beside the "bed," a 3-legged
chair (discarded from the vanished
kitchen), a sloping table;
the floor's been swept. A straw broom,
worn to a nub, leans at the former door.

The bed's so neatly arranged,
with matching sheets so neatly
tucked, I imagine hospital corners.
"The back seat of a car was good
enough for me," the builder laughs,
shaking his head—

but I think of these kids
so desperately domestic, snuggled
here in their fragile lair—love
isn't love without a place
to pretend to live. "The world
is a bridge," the Persians said,
"build no house upon it."

Tomorrow, this wreck comes down.

My father's given me the land.
To construct a house—to make
accommodations . . . We walk out
to the scar that looks too small.
The porch goes here, I tell the man,
the kitchen over there. Up on the hill,
he drives the markers in.

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DANA GIOIA

Business and Poetry

I. THE SITUATION

> . . . if you demand on the one hand,
> the raw material of poetry in
> all its rawness and
> that which is on the other hand
> genuine, then, you are interested in poetry.
> –Marianne Moore, "Poetry"

"Money is a kind of poetry," wrote Wallace Stevens, a vice-president of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co., a corporate lawyer, an expert on the bond market and, almost incidentally it might seem, one of America's greatest poets. It is a shame Stevens never expounded on this remark, for he certainly knew as much about both sides of the equation as any man of his time. But significantly Stevens, who spent most of his adult life working in a corporate office, never made the slightest mention of business or finance in all of his poetry and criticism.

That so prolific a writer would have maintained half a century of silence on the world of his daily life seems strange at first. His personality must be partially responsible. Few men and fewer writers have proven as reticent as Stevens about their private affairs. But personality is only part of it. Stevens' silence was hardly unusual when seen in the context of American poetry. There have been many important American poets who supported themselves—either from necessity or choice—by working in business, but none of them have seen it as an experience fit to write about.

Another American poet, T. S. Eliot, spent the most productive decade of his life working in the international department of Lloyd's Bank of London, but the closest he ever came to writing about it was in these lines from *The Waste-land*:

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At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting . . .

Hardly a major statement. But perhaps these lines summarize all that modern American poetry has had to say about the business world—its tedium, isolation, drabness and impersonality.

American poetry has defined business precisely by excluding it. Business does not exist in the world of poetry, and therefore by implication, it has become everything that poetry is not—a world without imagination, enlightenment, or perception. It is the world from which poetry is trying to escape.

Modern American poets have written superbly of bicycles, of groundhogs, of laundry left out to dry, of baseball cards and telephone poles. One of Randall Jarrell's best poems depicts a supermarket. Elizabeth Bishop has written movingly about an atlas, and Robert Lowell about breaking in a pair of contact lenses. James Dickey found a way to put animals in heaven, and Ezra Pound put many of his London literary acquaintences in hell. Sodomy, incest, pedophilia, and homosexuality have been no less domesticated by our domineering national Muse than have skunks, armadillos, tarantulas, hop toads, and at least one wart hog. But somehow this same poetic tradition has never been able to look inside the halls of a corporate office and see with the same intensity what perhaps thirty million Americans do during the working week. It often seems to be a poetry of the exception rather than the rule. Distant, visionary, refined, unreal and unrealistic. Our poetry, in short, seldom deals directly with the institutions that dominate American life, or, more significantly, with the situations which increasingly typify it. If our poetry recognizes business at all, it has reduced this enormous, diverse and sprawling national enterprise into a few static images inherited from the movies—the factory smokestack belching fumes (circa 1870), the pot-bellied tycoon with the gold watch chain puffing his cigar (circa 1890), the Charlie Chaplin lookalike subverting the assembly line (circa 1920), and perhaps for the truly *au courant* the man in the gray flannel suit burping after an expense account lunch on Madison Avenue (circa

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1950). A few images of a world seen only from the outside. For the most part what happens on Wall Street or Wilshire Boulevard seems, to the concerns of American poetry, as remote as icebound Zembla. No, more remote, for even Zembla has had its recent admirers.

To say all this is not to criticize so much as to observe and, I believe, to observe fairly. The business world, including the enormous corporate enterprises which for better and for worse have changed the structure of American life over the last fifty years, is generally and noticeably absent from the enormous body of poetry written in this century. While this is hardly a cause for alarm or even regret, it certainly deserves notice.

This exclusion is especially puzzling when one remembers that an important and recurring claim of contemporary American poetry has been its professed ability to deal with the full range of modern life. Everything, critics and teachers have insisted for decades, is the proper subject for modern poetry; unlike the art of the past, contemporary poetry excludes nothing. Likewise our poets have often announced their almost indiscriminate openness to experiencing and writing about everything America encompasses. One of the best and certainly the most succinct of these avowals appeared in Louis Simpson's Pulitzer Prize-winning volume, *At the End of the Open Road* (1963). Instructively the poem is entitled "American Poetry," and in it Simpson quickly summarizes the positions of both the formalist and experimental factions of modern verse. The entire poem runs:

> Whatever it is, it must have
> A stomach that can digest
> Rubber, coal, uranium, moons, poems.
>
> Like the shark, it contains a shoe.
> It must swim for miles through the desert
> Uttering cries that are almost human.

A brilliant short poem. One that almost rings authentic. But like most discussions of our native genius, it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Like it or not, certain foods agree

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best with certain stomachs. American poetry has always had an easier time digesting other poems than rubber or coal, and it has found even the most well-seasoned executives unpalatable. Although American poetry sets out to talk about the world, it usually ends up talking mainly about itself.

II. A DILATION ON MONEY

> Give money me, take friendship whoso list.
> —Barnabe Googe

Money and wealth are ancient subjects, as old as poetry. Although the economic interpretation of culture has mainly hit its vogue in the last century, philosophers, moralists, theologians, and historians have discussed the role of money since Xenophon. It has been from the beginning a constantly interesting and perplexing subject. The Bible is full of maxims and parables on earthly riches. Likewise, the mythology and folklore of every Western culture contain cautionary tales on the pursuit and possession of wealth—from Midas to Dives and on to Rumpelstiltskin. Greed and parsimony have always served as standard subjects for comedy. In our own tradition money has been a standard subject in poetry at least since Chaucer's pilgrims, and has continued to remain important not only in major poets like Ben Jonson and Alexander Pope but also in lesser ones like Barnabe Googe and George Crabbe. Hence modern poetry has never had any difficulty in assimilating money as a subject. It has only had to look toward tradition.

Business, however, is in many ways a modern concept. Certainly the ancients formed partnerships and corporations, but these were small and personal affairs when contrasted to the enormous organizations of today. Wealth can be personified in the wealthy, but how does one deal with a business once the founder has passed away, the company has merged into a conglomerate, and its real control has been divided between a dozen inconspicuous directors and a hundred thousand stockholders? Acquired, reorganized, and diversified, the company no longer has any immediately comprehensible identity. It exists in a world of market forces and economic

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principles remote from the myths and symbols of traditional poetry. Business, then, is an abstract collective noun as difficult to deal with as "liberty," "the people," or any other political buzzword.

Money has been a subject which has always interested American poets, possibly because they usually have had so little of it. For many poets, it must possess the irresistible lure of the unattainable. That the penurious young Eliot made so little mention of money in his poetry testifies not only to his patrician breeding; it may also be the best argument for considering him a British rather than an American poet. It is rather a writer like Pound who typifies the real native attitude—money is the root of all evil and all good. And who can deny its appeal to a poet, for is not money literally the one true metaphor, the one thing which can be translated into all else? Everything seems to have its price, and that price is denominated in money. It is hardly a coincidence that Pound's *Cantos*, whose unifying principle is metamorphosis, should eventually discover money as its theme. It was only one step from Ovid to economics.

But while money itself was a subject very interesting to poets, few of them really knew much about it. Not simply the subtleties of the money markets but even the basics of economics, "the dismal science," were lost on them. Yet what they did know about money was important: it bestowed power. It was not money but the possession of it that interested them. Gradually in the forties and fifties American poets began exploiting the theme that novelists had discovered half a century before—namely, that while America has no kings or popes or princesses, it does have its millionaires and billionaires. The Rockefellers and Mellons are our Romanovs and Medicis, and the legends that surround men like Howard Hughes are hardly less amazing than those around King Vlad of Transylvania.

In most of the poems in which American writers seem to be approaching business, they are usually talking about wealth or, more specifically, about the wealthy. Significantly, they deal with money in much the same way they deal with madness or genius. It is a gift or curse from the gods. For example, when Robert Lowell, who came from one of Boston's

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most distinguished families, discusses the effect of money on his relatives, he sees this wealth as a puzzling personal attribute, almost exactly analogous to his own poetic gift. As if in a pun, a fortune becomes a fate. Therefore, Lowell's presentations of the two businessmen in his immediate family—his grandfather, who made millions in hydraulic mining out West, and his father, who worked for Lever Brothers—are the stories of two individuals struggling with curses in the form of wealth. Likewise Randall Jarrell's remarkable monologue for an imaginary multimillionaire, appropriately entitled "Money" (which, like Lowell, he based on the life of a relative—an uncle who was a rich but hardly Croesean candy manufacturer), deals almost abstractly with power and personality. It could as easily be about a warlord or a king as about an industrialist.

Stevens was right. Money *is* a kind of poetry: an epic as encyclopedic as the *Cantos*. Consider just a few variations. Money, the long green, cash, stash, rhino, jack, or just plain dough. Choke it up, fork it over, shell it out. To be made of it! To have it to burn! Put it on a barrelhead. Grease it on a palm. It feathers a nest, holds heads above water, burns holes in pockets, and makes both ends meet. Just one long shot can make a big killing. *Musae Americanae, canamus paulo maiora*: let's raise the bidding and up the ante. No, I won't deny it. Who else is our national muse but lithe Miss Liberty who has paraded in alluring deshabille across two hundred years of currency and graced our pocket change with her universally crowned head.[1] As any coin collector knows, latter-day Eisenhowers and Susan B. Anthonys are no true substitutes. If there is a native genius for language and metaphor, he will be found discussing money. In lump sums or loose change, greenbacks or double eagles, megabucks or buffalo heads, our national vision is most easily translated into dollars and cents. Though rates of exchange may fluctuate, the subject is usually the same. But money, dear reader, is not business, and now let us return to the business of this essay.

[1] One of her heads deserves special mention—that on the so-called Mercury dime, minted between 1916 and 1945, which was modeled after a young woman named Elsie Viola Kachel, also known as Mrs. Wallace Stevens.

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III. WAYS OF SURVIVING

> Reading over this account of a literary apprenticeship, I find that it often mentions very small sums of money. There is good reason for the mention, considering that money is the central problem of a young writer's life, or of his staying alive.
> —Malcolm Cowley, "And I Worked at the Writer's Trade"

Most critics, I suspect, would hardly be concerned about the absence of business from the world of modern American poetry. They would probably feel instinctively that its omission was proper. And this feeling would not necessarily come from political motivation. The world of commerce would seem to them the territory of novelists and dramatists rather than of poets. It reflects a world of common experience, not the particular and private experiences supposedly at the center of poetry. If pressed, they might argue that its omission also comes from the personal backgrounds of our best poets. Few, they would assume, had much experience in the business world, so how could they write about it with any authority or interest?

We Americans have strong preconceptions about our poets. They must be people out of the ordinary; they must be strong, even eccentric individuals. Most often they are pictured either as scholars or vagabonds, Longfellows or Whitmans, Allen Tates or Allen Ginsbergs. The popular arts are full of such images as the dreamy-eyed, wavy-haired Leslie Howard wandering through America with a knapsack in *The Petrified Forest*. And to a surprising degree, even the more serious arts share these stereotypes—witness Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*, Jarrell's *Pictures From an Institution*, Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, and the various Beat novels. Significantly both academics and bohemians are perceived as living outside the economic and social systems which characterize our nation. They are cut off, usually by choice, from the daily lives of the American middle class. And we have been trained to respect them for this separation.

One anecdote will serve to summarize the conventional wisdom about business and poets. Allen Tate's brother, Benjamin Nathan Tate, was a self-made tycoon who had formed two coal companies in Cincinnati and sat on the Board of Directors of several large companies including Western Union.

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When Allen left Vanderbilt in 1923, Benjamin decided to help him on a business career by securing him a job in one of his coal offices. "In one day I lost the company $700 by shipping some coal to Duluth that should have gone to Cleveland," Tate later explained. Benjamin soon agreed that Allen should seek a literary career and, much to his credit, supported the poet at several crucial periods in his life. The moral is easily drawn. The poet is an impractical, dreamy sort of fellow incapable of holding down a real job. Too bored with business to pay attention to the most basic details of a job, a poet can be nothing but a poet.

But these stereotypes simply do not hold. As often as not, American poets have sprung up in the most unexpected places, including corporations. Stevens is not the inexplicable exception he is usually made out to be. Rather he is the exemplary figure for a certain type of American poet, a type he did not even originate.

Although one now thinks of Stevens as the archetypal businessman-poet, Stevens himself could have looked back to Edmund Clarence Stedman as a role model. Stedman, a now forgotten poet, was probably the most influential critic and anthologist of poetry in turn-of-the-century America, and his work was still a powerful presence during Stevens' youth. Born in Stevens' own Hartford in 1833, Stedman entered Yale at sixteen only to be expelled before graduation (though in that sweet irony that follows poets' careers, twenty-two years later the University awarded him an honorary degree). After several unsuccessful attempts at journalism Stedman came to Wall Street in 1863 where he soon opened up a brokerage firm. His financial and poetic careers prospered together. In his own poetry Stedman was a leading spokesman for the Genteel Tradition, but in his criticism he exhibited a broad appreciation for other poetry which found its fullest expression in his once definitive collection, *An American Anthology* (1900), which celebrated the nation's third century by defining the poetic achievement of its past. In town he presided over New York literary life while out in his country manor in the newly-established artists' colony of Bronxville he entertained little-known young poets like E. A. Robinson with

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his reminiscences of Whitman. He died at the height of his fame and prosperity in 1908.

Stedman has had many successors beyond Stevens and Eliot. Richard Eberhart was for many years one of the chief executives of the Butcher Polish Company in Boston and still sits on its Board of Directors. The late L. E. Sissman was a director and eventually a Vice-President of Kenyon and Eckhart, a Boston advertising agency, where he worked on accounts in the financial and food industries. Even the late Archibald MacLeish, a lawyer by training, spent a decade as editor of *Fortune*, the major American business magazine of the thirties and forties.

A. R. Ammons, who has won the Pulitzer Prize, the Bollingen Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry, was a salesman for a scientific glass manufacturer in New Jersey when his first book appeared. He had left teaching a few years earlier and joined the sales department of Friedrich and Dimmock, Inc. "It was total isolation," he later recalled, but when making sales calls in the Paterson area he did manage to visit the invalided William Carlos Williams and take him out for an occasional drive.

In his early thirties James Dickey also left teaching for a brief but extremely successful stint in business. He joined McCann-Erickson of Atlanta in the spring of 1956 as a junior copywriter on their newly acquired Coca-Cola account. When the advertising agency moved the account to their New York office, Dickey was promoted and transferred along with it. Three years later, having established himself in his new profession, he switched agencies to increase his salary and responsibilities, becoming copy chief of a small Atlanta agency. Two years later Dickey made another career jump, this time to become Creative Director at Burke Dowling Adams, Atlanta's largest agency. While making this meteoric rise in advertising, Dickey also published his first book, *Into the Stone and Other Poems*, on the strength of which he won a Guggenheim fellowship which inspired him to quit business for writing. Robert Phillips also left academics for advertising. After six years of college teaching, Phillips joined the creative department of Benton & Bowles as a copywriter in 1964, then

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moved through McCann-Erickson and Grey Advertising before ending up as Vice-President for J. Walter Thompson, America's largest domestic agency, where he has had major creative responsibility for the enormous Ford Motors and Eastman Kodak accounts.

There are many more examples. The late Richard Hugo spent thirteen years working for the Boeing Company in Seattle until the publication of his first book brought him the offer of a teaching position. In 1964 Ted Kooser left graduate school at the University of Nebraska and took a temporary job at Lincoln Benefit Life. He has worked there as an insurance underwriter ever since. William Bronk manages a large heating fuel company in upstate New York. R. M. Ryan works as a stockbroker in Milwaukee. Richard Grossman spent nearly ten years working for Gelco, a family-controlled leasing company in Minneapolis. Terry Kistler, the poet who is currently chairman of Poets & Writers, manages an investment firm. The late Ronald Perry was Director of Advertising and Public Relations for Outboard Marine International. Art Beck, the mysterious and talented San Francisco poet, is a pseudonym for a local banker. If one added the poets who also practiced law (a distinct profession which in some respects is more closely related to academics than to business), the list would be even longer. And there are undoubtedly many other businessmen-poets unknown to me.[2]

There were then at least half a dozen important American poets, and many minor ones, who were also businessmen. While this is an interesting fact in itself, it is also one that requires some qualification lest it be misleading. The exceptional careers these poets pursued while writing stand in such sharp contrast to the more conventionally "literary" careers of their contemporaries that it is easy to overlook the similarities. For both the lives and the works of these businessmen have more in common with the mainstream of American po-

[2] There have also been some would-be poets among American businessmen, most notably Hyman Sobiloff. A great philanthropist and mawkishly sentimental poet, Sobiloff sat on the board of half a dozen large companies, and must have had a yearly income considerably greater than that of the top forty American poets combined. He also bore the curious distinction of being the only American poet to have ever been nominated for an Oscar. Sobiloff, however, recognized that his verse was less than perfect and paid Conrad Aiken, Anatole Broyard, and later Delmore Schwartz to give him weekly poetry lessons, though he did have to park his limousine around the corner to avoid infuriating Schwartz.

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etry than one might suspect. It is first necessary to recall that none of them originally chose to make careers in business. Initially all of them attempted some conventional literary career. The young Stevens began enthusiastically as a journalist in New York. Eliot studied philosophy and then, like Dickey and Ammons, taught briefly. Eberhart studied at several universities and later became private tutor to the son of the King of Siam. Phillips served as a university administrator and teacher. But soon, because of exhaustion, failure, dissatisfaction, or simply poverty, all of these poets left their vocations for business jobs. In a sense, like most people, they "fell into" their new careers. Business was the most convenient alternative that society offered them when their earliest ambitions went sour, and they made what their parents and family probably called sensible choices.

That poetry was a long-standing vocation in the minds of these men has an importance beyond biographical accuracy. It is a necessary element in understanding their development as writers. When one sees how these well-educated men had professed poetry since youth, it becomes obvious that it is both naive and ill-informed to portray them as primitives emerging from the dark woods of corporate life suddenly able to speak with the tongues of men and angels. Too many critics have expressed a sort of innocent amazement that businessmen could actually write poetry, not to mention good and even great poetry. In different ways the public images of Stevens and Dickey have been especially distorted by this type of mythologizing. And it is easy to see why. The businessman-by-day/poet-by-night contrast makes good copy. Everyone enjoys stories of double lives and secret identities. Children have Superman; intellectuals have Wallace Stevens. Even first-rate critics have found it impossible to avoid the paradox of the mild-mannered insurance executive who wrote uncompromisingly modernist poetry at home. Witness Delmore Schwartz's mischievous glee in beginning his discussion of Stevens' poetry with a description of his office life. But is Stevens' gift to create supreme fictions while working in Hartford really more surprising than Ezra Pound's ability to write majestically of life while living in a degrading Pisan concentration camp? I think not. The course of Stevens' career, like those of the other businessmen-poets, is hardly unusual. Is it surprising

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that a Harvard man, formerly editor of the *Advocate* and a fledgling writer in New York, would eventually become a major American poet? Rather it is a classical beginning for an American writer. What was most odd about Stevens was not his occupation, but rather that he never visited Paris or Rome, since most company vice-presidents do that.

For some American poets, then, business was just one more way of surviving. While it was not the career that any of them wanted, it did support them until that other more difficult career became a reality. Let the naive think that the support they needed was only financial. Certainly a job in business paid the bills, but it also provided each poet with much more than money. At least outwardly, it gave direction to his life, providing him with a sense of place and purpose in his society. It gave him attainable goals—raises, promotions, pensions—in contrast to the seemingly unattainable goals of his private life. (Witness Eliot's pride at his promotion in the Lloyd's Bank international department during his obscure London years.) The routine of an office life might have been anaesthetizing, but this very feature also had its advantages for a poet. The pattern each job imposed on his life helped numb the anxiety he felt between poems, in those long, dry periods when it seemed he would never write again. For a job is more tangible than talent. It can't vanish suddenly the way that inspiration often seems to. And in a small way it gives the poet the success and security which poetry does not readily allow. In short, business provided these men with the same security and satisfaction that many of their contemporaries found in teaching. Young poets chose between both types of careers looking for the same rewards. Which direction they went in was only a matter of temperament.

IV. THE FIRST VOICE

> The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody.
>
> —T. S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry"

Stevens, Eliot, Ammons, Dickey, and the other poets I have mentioned form an extremely diverse group. They differ as much in the types of companies they worked for as in the

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poetry they wrote. They come from different parts of the country and different levels of society. They share no obvious spiritual or literary affinities. Indeed, most of them seem only remotely aware of the existence of the others. There is almost no similarity among them except that they all wrote poetry while working in business. Yet if one studies the lives of the poets about whom any biographical information is available, some curious resemblances begin to emerge.

All of these poets were successful in their business careers and soon achieved a comfortable, secure standard of living. Yet once they had achieved any level of fame, they immediately quit their jobs (all except Stevens, that is, for whom real fame came very late in life). And finally and most significantly, although they wrote much of their best work during their years of employment, none of them had anything to say about their experiences at work, at least in their poetry. While their working lives may have had an important influence on the course of their writing, this influence was never directly manifested. They maintained a disinterested silence about their workaday worlds. Confessional poetry may be a dominant mode in American poetry, but while it has unlocked the doors to a poet's study, living room, and bedroom, it has stayed away from his office—unless, perchance, the office happened to be located in some university English department.

Given the strongly personal and often autobiographical character of most American poetry, it seems astonishing that these men did not use the images and situations of their daily occupations as what Marianne Moore called the "raw material" of their poetry (which, as she pointed out earlier in the same poem, should not "discriminate against 'business documents' "). Their aversion to using this part of their lives is an indication, I believe, of how strongly the prevailing fashions in American poetry have determined what is written even by its most gifted poets. It is proof of Northrop Frye's conjecture that what a poet writes comes more from the other poetry he has read than from his own experience in life. And it is at least a hint that in the creative process of our writers a certain form of voluntary censorship goes on which determines what and how the poet will write.

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Such a criticism is not intended as an indictment of the lack of political and social commitment in modern American poetry, though this very real lack may be taken as a sign of the problem I am discussing. Instead, these observations point to a rather larger complaint—namely, that American poetry has been unable to maintain or create a meaningful public idiom, and that it even appears to lack many of the elements out of which such an idiom might be formed. At present, most American poetry has very little in common with the world outside of literature—no reciprocal sense of mission or direction, no mutual set of ideas and concerns, no shared symbolic structure, no overlapping feeling of tradition. Often it seems that the two worlds don't even share a common language. At its best our poetry has been private rather than public, intimate rather than social, ideological rather than political. It has discussed symbolic places rather than real ones, even when it has given the symbols real names. It dwells more easily in timeless places than historical ones. For many reasons—some of them compelling—most of our poets have rejected the vernacular of educated men and tried to develop distinctly personal and often private languages of their own.

Much was gained in this process of refinement—greater accuracy and intensity in language, intellectual rigor, and surprising originality. Much was also lost, not the least of which was the poet's audience. But long before this audience disappeared, a more important thing had already happened: the poet had lost his sense of addressing a public, lost the belief that he and they had anything significant in common. This failure of assurance or concern changed everything he wrote. There still could be occasional public statements or popular successes, but they seemed incidental to the general course of the art. Readers still existed, but no longer did they form a cohesive or important group. Nor did they even matter economically. They were too few and too scattered to reward the poet with either wealth or fame. At times they almost seemed to exist in spite of him, and he in spite of them.

Paradoxically, the poet in business has thrived in this neglect. His job, like the academic's, has sheltered him from the economic consequences of writing without an audience, and

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possibly in some real way working has even tutored him in surviving alienation. Every day at the job reminds him what a seemingly futile life he leads. If they knew about his writing at all, his business associates would surely see no more value in such unlucrative endeavors than his fellow poets would see in his drab job. The poet then is doubly dismissed—by his peers in both professions. Meanwhile he is doubly busy with both vocations. If he survives at all, he will certainly be able to face the neglect of an invisible public without much additional difficulty. If he survives as a poet, he will be writing for himself, but then writing for such an appreciative and discerning audience has its advantages (though fame and wealth are not among them). Writing for one's self makes an autobiographical exposition unnecessary. The poet can plunge immediately into the particular idea or experience that interests him. The organization can be complex, the ideas difficult, and the symbolism private. It doesn't matter as long as the poet himself can follow them. They belong to a private world which is the poet's mind. His poems are what Stevens described in "The Planet on the Table":

> Ariel was glad he had written his poems.
> They were of a remembered time
> Or of something seen that he liked.
>
> Other makings of the sun
> Were waste and welter
> And the ripe shrub writhed.
>
> His self and the sun were one
> And his poems, although makings of his self,
> Were no less makings of the sun.
>
> It was not important that they survive.
> What mattered was that they should bear
> Some lineament or character,
>
> Some influence, if only half-perceived,
> In the poverty of their words,
> Of the planet of which they were part.

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V. THE UNCOMMON VOICE

> Then surely the splendour of the language is something in excess of the sense, adding enormously to our pleasure but not assisting (rather obstructing) our understanding.
> —Donald Davie, "Essential Gaudiness: The Poems of Wallace Stevens"

> I am a man of fortune greeting heirs.
> —Wallace Stevens

Office life, investments, interest rates, corporate politics, annual reports—these are not subjects which would seem especially congenial to poetry, and one can understand how a poet, even one for whom these topics were matters of daily concern, would ignore them. Certainly Eliot, Stevens, Ammons, and the others managed to ignore them and still write distinctly personal poetry. But must one conclude then that there was no fruitful interchange whatever between these poets' literary and professional lives? Could there not have been a less obvious connection? Knowing that these poets made careers in business, would it not be reasonable to assume that some of them at least might have written poetry more closely related to the language and concerns of the average man than did their academic and bohemian contemporaries? Yet this is clearly not the case.

It is surprising to notice how consistently extreme these poets often were in developing distinctly private and literary languages. While poets as dissimilar as the academic, Yvor Winters, and the full-time outsider, Robinson Jeffers, kept their diction and syntax scrupulously within the bounds of common speech, the businessmen, Stevens and Eliot, pushed vocabulary and grammar not only to the limits of comprehensibility but quite often beyond. Stevens in particular sometimes wrote with the wild, inventive abandon of a Shakespearean clown who has suddenly found himself the protagonist of a tragedy. Nonsense can be serious stuff, and from this point of view Stevens is the finest nonsense poet in American literature, an Edward Lear for epistemologists. This unfortunately is an aspect of his talent too often missed by his more serious academic commentators.

Another nonacademic professional, Dr. William Carlos Williams, often remarked that while his daily work as an obstetri-

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cian exhausted him, it also exercised a good influence on his poetry. Working with common people filled his ears with the contemporary, spoken American English he would use so distinctively in his poems. Surprisingly, for Stevens, Eliot, Ammons, and the others the similar experience of working in business had the opposite effect. Rather than pushing their work in the direction of colloquial language, their professional lives seem to have given them a deep dissatisfaction with the general spoken idiom as a medium for poetry. Perhaps after a full working day of sensible, no-nonsense talk in the office, these poets received a secret, rebellious pleasure in letting themselves go at night by writing extravagantly simply for the joy of it.

Only after work could Stevens, who wore conservative grey suits and drank coffee at the office, write "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," which begins:

> Not less because in purple I descended
> The western day through what you called
> The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

A highly conventional passage for Stevens, who compulsively made up foreign-sounding words and names, prized paradoxes, and gave his difficult abstract poems brilliant but mysterious titles.

Returning home from a ten-hour day of tabulating the balance sheets of correspondent foreign banks, Eliot wrote some of the most allusive and elusive poetry in English, poems more difficult than any he had written while a student of philosophy. Few truly great poems in our language are as difficult as those Eliot wrote while working at Lloyd's. The difficulties of *The Waste Land* are well known, but even Eliot's minor poems of this period often read like purposefully forbidding private jokes. One poem begins:

> Polyphiloprogenitive
> The sapient sutlers of the Lord
> Drift across the window-panes.
> In the beginning was the Word.

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The poem continues with neologisms and conspicuously unusual words (often rhyme words designed to call attention to themselves)—"superfetation," "mensual," "piaculative," "epicene." As in Stevens, one must often pause to determine what is going on beneath the playful verbal surface. In a poem like the one above, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," the social commentary has been transformed into an exercise in private sensibility. Significantly, Eliot also developed his gift for nonsense poetry during this period.

Stevens and Eliot left a valuable heritage of how language could be used aggressively in poems, and the later businessmen-poets have been conspicuous among their heirs. Ammons and Dickey, for example, have both shared the interest in exploiting language for its own sake. While Robert Creeley, a bohemian academic, was adapting Williams' "American idiom" to distill a poetry made up of the sparsest conversational diction and syntax, his exact contemporary, A. R. Ammons, while still an executive, developed the same idiom into an extravagantly different style. Whatever one thinks of Ammons' long, carefully syncopated sentences, his ostentatious puns, or his sometimes knotty diction, it is impossible to deny that his poetry uses language in a forceful and distinctively individual way. Likewise James Dickey's poems often seem to carry themselves on by the sheer energy of their verbal invention. Whether he is imitating the sermon of a fervent woman evangelist or recreating the wandering mind of a drunken telephone lineman, Dickey puts his trust (sometimes undeservedly) in the force of the speaking voice and allows it to spill relentlessly from line to line. There is, in short, a degree of verbal aggression in the work of both Dickey and Ammons that one does not often notice in the poetry of their contemporaries.

The poetry of William Bronk is uncommon in a somewhat different way, though it too can be seen in relation to the work of Stevens. Like Stevens, Bronk really has one principal subject underlying his poetry—the perception of reality. His characteristic form is the short, imageless poem:

> We aren't even here but in a real here
> Elsewhere—a long way off. Not a place
> To go to but where we are: there.
> Here is there. This is not a real world.

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Concise, abstract, and earnest, Bronk's poems are as extreme as Ammons' or Eliot's most difficult work in their rejection of the imprecision and ease of common speech. They are poems of solitude and isolation, as austere as a mathematical equation. Every word bears the weight of thought and reflection. Bronk is not an ingratiating poet to read. He does not want to be. In order to appreciate him one must accept his work totally on its own terms. Otherwise it seems trivial or pompous. Bronk will not meet on the reader's terms. The whiteness of the page is his universe, not ours. Like Ammons or Dickey or Stevens he tries to become a god and create the world of a poem on that whiteness.

These examples are not presented to prove that working in business had a crucial role in developing these poets' particularly extravagant or abstract styles. That development was the result of each writer's personal background, education, personality and situation. What is important is that business had no overtly countervailing effect of simplifying their style or choosing their subject matter. The paradox is simply that these "men of the world" wrote or write in a much more private universe than their supposedly sheltered academic counterparts. Perhaps because they worked in isolation, or because their private calling to poetry seems to them to have so little to do with their daily work, these men have trouble addressing any audience but themselves. Their poems are soliloquies rather than speeches, poetry which the reader does not so much hear as overhear. Contrast brash, forceful poets like Stevens or Dickey or Ammons with an academic poet and the difference becomes immediately apparent. Take, for example, William Stafford, who is usually considered one of the most personal and quiet American poets writing. Do any of the three poets above speak with such calm self-assurance to real people as does Stafford? Listen to this short, characteristic passage from "A Ritual to Read to Each Other":

> If you don't know the kind of person I am
> And I don't know the kind of person you are
> A pattern that others made may prevail in the world
> And following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

He might even be addressing Stevens.

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VI. SOME CONCLUSIONS

> Though Stevens found it tiresome when others pointed to his dual career as businessman-poet, that afternoon he himself called attention to it and the way he handled it. Louis Martz, his campus host that day, recalls " . . . he opened up his briefcase and he said, 'Now you see everything is neatly sorted out here. Over here in this compartment . . . is my insurance business with the farmers, and over here in this compartment is my lecture and some poems that I want to read. I keep them completely separated.' At other times, though, Stevens might argue just the opposite, stressing the seamlessness of his career . . . "
>
> —Peter Brazeau, "Wallace Stevens on the Podium: The Poet as Public Man of Letters"

The purpose of this study so far has been to challenge the assumptions one normally makes about poets and to raise some serious questions about at least one facet of the relationship between life and art. The discussion has been focused on modern American poets who were also businessmen and the problematic relationship between their two careers—but the underlying issues have been much broader. The questions raised, in fact, have to do with how any serious artist survives and works in modern society. Looking at poets who worked as businessmen only focused the discussion on one of the more extreme and paradoxical examples of the modern artist. And so in exploring the questions specifically raised by this odd group of individuals, I will also try to deal with the more general problem of how American poets, who cannot make a living from their art, still manage to write and develop. The questions are specific to the businessmen-poets; the answers, which are both tentative and subjective, will, I hope, in some sense approach the broader issues.

First, it is necessary to recapitulate the key questions raised so far in this discussion. How did business affect the lives and works of these poets? Is it really of no significance that each of them spent years working in jobs that were alien if not antagonistic to their vocations as poets? Were these jobs only ways of surviving until fame caught up to them? Is anything even gained by segregating them off as a distinct group of writers and comparing them to other poets whose lives seem

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more typical? These are serious questions that anyone, who looks closely at the lives of these poets, must ask. The facts, as they exist, point towards an almost absolute separation between their business careers and imaginative lives. But can this really be all there is to say about the matter? Common sense instinctively demands a more complex relationship between life and art. Parts of the same man's life can't be split apart as easily as Stevens claimed to Louis Martz. While it is certainly part of the story (and possibly the most remarkable part) that these poets led strictly divided lives for many years, there must also have been deeper connections between their two distinct careers. Here the critic must become a speculator using inferences, assumptions, and second guesses, but risks are sometimes necessary to achieve difficult goals. And one law of investment remains constant across business and poetry: the higher the risk, the higher the potential reward.

There is no need to dwell on the unfortunate effects of business careers on each of these poets. The difficulties they faced are obvious. Their careers took up the greater part of their time and energy. Coupled with the responsibilities of family life (all of these poets were married), their careers forced their reading and writing into odd hours (late evenings, weekends, brief vacations) and probably prevented them from reading and writing as much as they would have liked. Stevens and Eliot both complained about this deprivation, and it is reasonable to assume that we would hear similar complaints from Dickey, Ammons, Bronk and the others if we had access to their letters and journals. In the same way their careers isolated them to a greater or lesser degree from the world of writers, artists, and intellectuals in which most academics and professional writers move. Unless like Eliot they had the friendship of a Pound, they lived very much on the margins of literary life. While working they simply did not have the leisure to participate more fully in the broad range of literary experience. There was little time to travel, give readings or lectures, edit magazines or anthologies, accept residencies at universities, nor even much time for mixing at the parties, receptions, and conferences where writers and artists so often meet. In a real sense business turned these poets into outsiders in the literary world.

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These are considerable disadvantages. Time to think, time to read, time for idle but intelligent conversation—all of these are essential for most young writers' development, and it is foolish to think that without them a writer's performance won't suffer in some way. Likewise it is hard, discouraging work to write in isolation during one's few spare hours after working a full day in an office (or a classroom). How inconceivably private the act of writing must have been for Stevens drafting out poems night after night in the unbroken solitude of suburban Hartford!

From another perspective, however, these unsupportive conditions might seem like advantages. For example, while working in business might have cut these poets off from the literary world, it also sheltered them from it. Working obviously sheltered them economically. It gave them an income independent from writing, freeing them from most literary hackwork. They did not have to review uninteresting books, write matter-of-fact lectures, teach unwanted classes, sell every poem and essay. They could afford to pick and choose what they wrote.

An outsider has another advantage. While he may feel intense pressure to prove himself as a writer to the people he rightly or wrongly perceives as "insiders" (editors, academics, self-supporting writers), he has the advantage of setting his own pace. Paradoxically, this doubly busy man enjoys a leisure which professional poets both inside and outside the academy do not. The outsider can wait however long it takes to mature as a writer, whereas the professional poet must try to speed up the process. Hence Stevens could wait until he was nearly forty-four before publishing *Harmonium*, perhaps the most remarkable first book in American poetry, and then could afford another thirteen years of silence before bringing out a second collection. Likewise Ammons managed a decade of quiet growth between the publication of his first, privately-printed volume and his second, widely-acclaimed book. And Eliot, in another way, could carefully conserve his energy, waiting months or years between perfectly achieved poems. For the creative writing teacher the pressures of "publish or perish" may be fatal. The same university job, which frees a young poet from many financial worries, can also add the irresistible pressure to write too much too soon, and the writ-

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ing may become slick, automatic, and superfluous. Of course, poets inside and outside the academy can survive these pressures, but it is not easy, the demands of tenure, promotion, prestige and money being as great as they are.

There may even be advantages in missing the society of other writers. One may lose the fun of talking with professional wordsmiths, or miss the confidence of knowing the people whose names one sees on by-lines and editorial mastheads, but one doesn't waste ideas in conversation. Talking is easier than writing and much more immediately gratifying. More than one poet has poured his genius into conversation at the expense of his poetry. Also, a person working in business is not constantly besieged by the latest artistic fads. A poet's sense of his own direction might sharpen best if he is not forced to defend or discuss it every day in a classroom or café. Witness how steadfastly Stevens wrote his own private poetry during the frenetically political thirties. Would he have been able to defend the integrity of his work if he had not been working in a Hartford insurance office? Probably not. Eliot, Ammons, Bronk, and Dickey show the same integrity in following their own direction and sensibilities; whatever their faults, they are clearly strongly individual writers.

Eliot saw an additional advantage in being constantly busy with another career. It kept one from writing unnecessary poems. Eliot frowned on poets who wrote when they had nothing new to say. Nor was it necessary, he felt, to force one's self to write—since the really important poems would force themselves out. When George Seferis, the great modern Greek poet, visited Eliot in London, he complained that his duties as a diplomat left him no time for writing. Eliot chided him, saying that this was actually a blessing and his poems would be better for the wait. The unconscious, he told Seferis, is working all the time.

As usual, Eliot had a point. For some poets at least, long silences are an essential stage in their creative development. The classic examples are Rilke and Valéry, for whom many years of poetic silence became the necessary preparation for writing their greatest work. Their cases are clearly extreme, but silences of more modest duration have often proved necessary for other poets, especially at turning points in their careers. A few poets like Hardy or Lawrence apparently man-

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aged to write continuously throughout their lives, but for most poets, even great ones, writing is an exhausting, intermittent process. A competent poet can always turn out some lines of verse for whatever occasion, but a serious poet at some crucial stage in his writing may hesitate to write at all. His old style of writing no longer seems authentic or appropriate, and a new form of expression that answers his particular needs seems impossible to find or difficult to achieve.

How poets overcome these crucial changes in life is an interesting study. Stevens, whose confidence was shattered after the uneventful debut of *Harmonium*, stopped writing for years and devoted himself to office work and private reading. Eliot, on the other hand, abandoned poetry at the height of his career after the triumphant reception of *Four Quartets*, turning his attention entirely to drama and prose. Some poets, however, show a less dramatic kind of courage and are willing to endure months or even years of self-doubt while they wait between poems. Like Rilke they will not write when there is nothing to say. They know that they cannot fake the real thing. Instead they let the work mature slowly in the back of their minds or shape itself through innumerable drafts and revisions. It is essential for these poets not to force themselves to write too much or too quickly.

Business has proven a helpful shelter for this careful, introspective kind of writer. Their jobs kept them sufficiently occupied to take away some of the guilt and self-questioning of not being able to write. For some poets teaching or translation fills a similar need, but these undertakings may be too closely related to writing to offer comfort for everyone. To businessmen-poets like Stevens and Eliot the monotonous pattern of office life was necessary to give them a sense of security and relief. While such regulation would have been unbearable to hyperactive, extroverted poets like Pound or Auden, for some of their contemporaries it obviously worked, and the proof is in their poetry.

Outside careers also sheltered these men from other dangers. In some way hard to pin down, their jobs protected them from the occupational hazards of writing poetry. For whatever reasons, the profession of poetry is a dangerous one in America, perhaps because it is so damnably difficult to suc-

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ceed in it in any meaningful way. Some poets have literally killed themselves for fame, destroying themselves slowly in public before distastefully appreciative audiences. Suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty, and madness are all too often fellow-travellers of poetry in this country, as the biographies of our poets clearly demonstrate. This essay is not the place to speculate on why this should be so, but a glance at the lives of writers like Hart Crane, Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Weldon Kees, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton show it to be the case. Nor is it new. Baudelaire noticed this distinctively American curse in the life of Poe, and it creeps in less overtly even in the lives of writers like Robert Frost, Conrad Aiken, and Theodore Roethke.

Working in business gave the poets I have discussed a healthy perspective on their careers as writers. It also gave them other accomplishments that helped soften the continual sense of frustration and failure any poet will feel at times. It tutored them too in the difficult virtue of patience. But most importantly, working in nonliterary careers taught them an important lesson that too few American writers learn—that poetry is only one part of life, that there are some things more important than writing poetry. This is an obvious statement to anyone but a writer, yet it is one that too few American poets have ever learned because it addresses life and not art. It has nothing to do with writing poetry, and knowing it will never help a writer perfect his craft or gain fame. But learning it may help him survive. F. Scott Fitzgerald's dictum, "There are no second acts in American lives," is too often true when applied to poets, but it need not be so. Eliot survived the disastrous breakdown of his marriage, and Stevens the public failure of *Harmonium*, and both of them went on to write more of their best work because they had this hard-earned perspective on their lives. And ultimately this perspective is the lesson that anyone will learn who studies the lives of the men who have combined careers in business and poetry. It may not be an edifying lesson, but it is a necessary one, and one that lets this odd group of poets survive and prosper—a rare fate for poets in any country or age.

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Reviews

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Sex and the Single Novel

YOUR CHRONICLER, WHO HAS BEEN READING a good deal of contemporary fiction of late, must admit to being a bit tired. He has been out whoring with the boys. He hasn't, you understand, been doing any of the actual fornicating himself. Mostly he waits at the curb in the car, and when the boys—and a few of the girls—come down they tell him all about it. That nice Johnny Updike, for example, no matter how heavy the passion he's describing, he always has time to throw in a few ornate metaphors. John Irving, who is in such marvelous physical shape, why he can topple the baby sitter and come back home and do his wife. Robert Stone, now there's a strange guy for you, why in his last novel he made it with a nun. And Bern Malamud—I mean, for God sake, who would have thought it!—Bern in his last novel but one went at it hammer and tongs with a kid in her early twenties; and then in his last novel, damned if he didn't boff a chimpanzee. These contemporary American novelists, man, they sure know how to live.

What your chronicler is tired of, it will by now be obvious, is reading about sex in novels. His objection, the reason for his fatigue, is not prudish but aesthetic. The feeling of reading one novelistic sex bout after another resembles nothing so much as reading Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, the book, it will be recalled, in which Queneau told the same story one hundred different ways. So it is with sex in the contemporary novel: the same story told one hundred different ways. Yet are they all that different? To paraphrase an expression popular at my old high school—it will, I fear, be apparent that I did not attend Eton—put a dust jacket over their pages and they all read alike. What is more, it is not merely that elaborate sexual detail appears in contemporary novels, but that it is so often at the center of these novels. The toss in the hay has come to stand in for Raskolnikov murdering the old pawnbroker, Napoleon entering a blazing Moscow, the death of young Paul Dombey. This great liberation in the subject matter available to novelists has for the most part come about since the end of World War Two. During that war it was General George S. Patton who, in the attempt to stir on the troops, announced that, when the fighting was over, it would be the victors who would be doing the expletive

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deleting. What he failed to mention is that the rest of us would endlessly have to read about it.

With a large batch of contemporary novels before me, then, I knew I was in for some heavy sex. To relieve the tedium of it, I thought it might be helpful to keep a scorecard, much like a baseball fan. Make a scorecard I did, on a piece of long-lined notebook paper. After writing "A Sexual Scorecard" at the top, I ruled five lines down the length of the page, which left six columns. At the leftmost column I planned to note the title of the novel I was reading and the remaining five columns were entitled, reading from left to right, "Straight Fornication," "Fellatio," "Cunnilingus," "Sodomy," and "Other." By making check marks in the appropriate column, I could have a clear sense, when I was finished with a particular novel, of the density of sex in the book and of its variety. The column "Other" presented certain tabulatory problems, but I would worry about those later. Who could say, I might even be able to turn this scorecard in for a six-month stay at the Center for Behavioral Sciences at Stanford?

Visions of wintering in Palo Alto receded, however, with the first novel on my list, which was Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*,[1] a book about a boy growing up into painful awareness that he is a homosexual. (Could accounts of homosex result in too many marks in my "Other" column and thus skew my scorecard?) The novel comes swathed in the best of blurbs. "The style can take your breath away," says James Merrill. And Susan Sontag, another satisfied customer, says: "*A Boy's Own Story* is full of pungent observation, wonderful language and convincing sensuality." Leaving aside the question of what unconvincing sensuality might be, is there anything to these claims? Can the product live up to the label?

Edmund White, along with having written two previous novels, is the author of *The Joy of Gay Sex* and *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America*. This publishing fact complicates things miserably. Because of the rather professionally homosexual books Mr. White has written, it is a bit difficult to take him, so to say, straight. I suspect that if he were asked Mr. White would say that he does not wish to be thought of as a homosexual writer but instead as a writer who happens to be a homosexual. This is the standard—and quite sensible—response: Saul Bellow has made it when labelled a Jewish writer; Ralph Ellison has made it when labelled a Negro writer. Yet—and here is where the complication begins to set in—neither Bellow nor Ellison, I think, would object if one were to call a book of his "a very Jewish novel" or "a very Negro novel." I think, moreover, that everyone would have some rough understanding of those terms. But would Mr. White mind if one called *A Boy's Own Story* "a very homosexual novel"? And does everyone have the same rough un-

[1] A BOY'S OWN STORY, by *Edmund White*. E. P. Dutton. $13.95.

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derstanding of what such terms mean? Is even such a term as "homosexual sensibility" allowed?

It had better be, for I know no other way to explain Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*, a book whose very title is homosexual campiness. Mr. White is a gifted writer, who composes in a sometimes poetical prose that can, when it is humming along well, work fine effects. There is even a quality of light to his prose; it is as if the incidents in his novel are taking place chiefly at dusk. Sometimes dusk turns to dark in the form of overdone metaphors: "The coat came off and fell in a heap on the floor; then a sweater threw its twisted body onto the coat: clumsy wrestlers." But when Mr. White describes something, generally you see it. When he is sharp, he is very sharp: "For psychoanalysis feeds on intensity, as though life were all flame and no ash." Still, there are passages in *A Boy's Own Story* that I submit could only have been written by a writer who is a homosexual:

> I was fascinated by a woman who worked there [in a bookshop]. She moved and talked and even sang as though she were on a big stage and not in a very small store. I had seen an overweight and coquettish diva portray Carmen, and this woman seemed just as ready for the role—a peasant blouse worn off the shoulders and so low as to reveal the tops of large breasts; black hair drawn back into a ponytail that hopped almost of its own accord from her back up onto her shoulder, where it would perch like a pet as she nuzzled it with her cheek; a tiny waist sadistically cinched in by a stout black belt that laced up the front; ample hips in rolling motion under a long skirt that swirled in meticulously ironed pleats around her; and small feet with painted nails in sandals she remained true to even on snowy days. She bathed herself in a heavy, ruttish perfume that suggested neither a girl nor a matron but rather the overripe coquette, the sort of imposing beauty one could imagine a weak nineteenth century king taking on as his mistress.

That is quite a passage: it has a cool precision, a feel for artifice and oddity, more than a soupçon—a tablespoon?—of malice. Although not so inspissated as this, there are other portraits in *A Boy's Own Story*, especially that of the hero's father, that easily surpass it. If Christopher Isherwood could announce "I am a camera," Edmund White, on the basis of this book, is entitled to announce "I am Diane Arbus."

A Boy's Own Story is most impressive when it is looking outward upon the world; it is less impressive when the lens is turned inward to capture the life of the young hero of this autobiographical novel. A certain amount of sentimentality creeps into the self-portraiture. ("I am Fabian Bachrach.") And, it must be added, an even greater

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amount of unpersuasive psychologizing. One of the pleasant things about being heterosexual is that at least you don't have to explain how you got that way. But how one got to be homosexual still seems to call for an explanation. Much of Mr. White's novel is, in a roundabout way, an attempt to supply one, and the more moving portions of the book have to do with Mr. White's young hero's uncomfortable awareness that fate had dealt him this particular card. "I see now," he thinks in retrospect, "that what I wanted was to be loved by men and to love them back but not to be a homosexual."

As for the explanation of how the hero of *A Boy's Own Story* became homosexual, I fear Edmund White has little more to offer than what Vernon Young has called "the classical homosexual alibi." In this instance the explanation has to do with a preternaturally youthful love of beauty—"It seemed to me then that beauty is the highest good, the one thing we all want to be or have or, failing that, destroy. . . ."—and an unloving father who did not understand the boy's nature. Mr. White does not make it seem quite so mechanistic as I have done, but finally this is what, in his novel's pages, it comes down to. Nor does it help that Mr. White supplies a few of what in the encyclopaedia business are called add-ons. One of these add-ons is his homosexual version of the Oedipus Complex. "I feel sorry," the novel's hero says, "for a man who never wanted to go to bed with his father."

The advantages of the homosexual sensibility, as it has shown itself along a range of writers in ascending order of importance from Firbank to Forster to Proust, are, first, a clear eye; second, a talent for understanding and yet stripping away artifice; and third, and a result of first and second, an impressive detachment that, when it is working well, can see the world plain. Difficulties crop up chiefly when the homosexual sensibility takes up one subject in particular: this subject is, of course, homosexuality. Thus the one thoroughly hopeless novel E. M. Forster wrote was *Maurice*, his only openly homosexual novel. Thus, too, not the least of the brilliant strategies in *The Remembrance of Things Past* was Proust's disguising his own homosexuality, all the better to write about homosexuality. Thus, finally, the staggering problem with Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* is that it is in its vision altogether too sexy, holding that not only does everyone walk around with one or another sexual secret but that indeed "the world is governed by a minority, the sexually active, and that they hold sway over a huge majority of the nonsexual, those people too young or too old or too poor or homely or sick or crazy or powerless to be able to afford sexual partners (or the luxury of systematic, sustained and shared introspection, so sexual in its own way)." Alas, as a vision of how life works, this point of view simply won't wash, nor will it drip dry.

On the Sexual Scorecard I credited Edmund White with descriptions of one act of straight fornication, two of sodomy, and two of

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fellatio; a description of masturbation and another of *ménage à trois* I chalked up in the column marked Other. Poor Frederic Raphael, with only two descriptions of straight fornication to show in *Oxbridge Blues*,[2] cannot hold a candle to Mr. White. Frederic Raphael is a man whose work makes vivid the old phrase "too clever by half." (As I write that phrase I can hear him reply, "I can let you have it for a third.") Jokes, puns, *schticklach* of all kinds rattle around in his work. The joke, in its various forms, is his characters' chief response to life, which is all right with me, except that they all ought to be superior jokes, which, in Mr. Raphael's pages, they often aren't. "Have you ever been in a tight corner?" one character asks another. "All my corners have been rather loose-fitting, I'm glad—and slightly ashamed—to say." Too low on the laugh-meter, I fear.

In the stories that comprise *Oxbridge Blues* Mr. Raphael's subject is life in what passes for intellectual society in contemporary England. His characters are young men and women who, after duly taking their firsts at Oxford and Cambridge, come down to London where they make careers at writing cleverly for the weeklies (Colin, the chief character in "The Muse," "managed, as ever, to be trenchant without being savage"); or they are bookish women whose French even includes words such as "*couillons*" (not in my *Larousse de poche*) and who "turn down a chance to do Baudelaire in the *Critical Studies Series*"; or successful publishers; or onward and upward academics whose faces are familiar at international conferences. Mr. Raphael knows this world, for he is himself very much of it. He is, it will be recalled, the author of *The Glittering Prizes*.

Frederic Raphael has down very well what I think of as the new English style. It is a style at once nervous yet knowing, trendy but aware of the emptiness in trendiness, jokey yet issuing in laughter that rings rather hollow. It is a style unsuitable for making large statements yet much better suited for mocking them. Mockery seems to be the reigning note in the stories in *Oxbridge Blues*. Mr. Raphael's characters seem always to be having at one another; they can barely hold their contempt in check, and sometimes they let it out of check. So often in these stories one character feels it incumbent upon himself to let the next character know that he, the latter, is a bloody phoney.

Many of the one-liners and exchanges in *Oxbridge Blues* seem more memorable than the book's discrete stories. In "On the Black List" a woman, speaking of contemporary art, announces: "Hard-edge is dead. It was in *Time* magazine. . . . " To which another character replies: "That *Time* magazine, it sure can be a bitch sometimes." In "The Best of Friends," a woman remarks of marriage: "Michael says it's an invaluable arrangement whereby a man and

[2] OXBRIDGE BLUES, by *Frederic Raphael*. Jonathan Cape Ltd. $13.95.

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woman can live together without wondering whether they ought to get married." In "Private Views," a London restaurant is mentioned where "the specialties are summer pudding and spring boys." In the story "Oxbridge Blues," a woman has "an inexhaustible appetite for unparagraphed talk." "You only live once," a woman in the same story says. "It is a comfort, isn't it?" is the response.

In all of Mr. Raphael's stories there is an emptiness at the center. What once filled this emptiness? In the story "The Best of Friends," a left-wing academic says to an old friend now in publishing, "The Iron Curtain's turned rusty on us." He goes on to explain:

> "We're cornered, Peter, is what I'm saying. We've only got sex left, the only unsleeping idea in our brainy little heads. They've let us down, the bloody reds, by being so unattractive that not even a happily married man could really fancy them. Oh if only they'd kept Socialism a little prettier, if only they'd let us deceive ourselves as to her virtue, how willing we would have been! If only Eastern promises didn't have such blindingly bad breath, how quick we would have been to paddle across the Rubicon and throw in our shifty lot with them! We wouldn't mind them being cruel, at least to others, if only they'd stayed faintly glamorous and intellectually adroit."

If Mr. Raphael could have supplied more such passages he would, I think, be a most impressive writer. He is certainly not without a serious subject: that of the lives of the English intellectual class, their British imperial dream vanished, their world socialist dream vanished, themselves left very much on the sidelines, chirping away amusingly enough but with absolutely nothing to cheer about. Sad stuff.

On the Sexual Scorecard Milan Kundera, in *The Joke*,[3] scores what at my high school (no, it wasn't Winchester either) would have been called a gang bang and a gang rape (what fine distinctions!) and a single act of straight fornication combined with a good beating, not to mention a number of failed seduction attempts. But, to demonstrate how a scorecard can often inadequately reflect what goes on in the game, all the sex in *The Joke* is repulsive and was intended to be. Mr. Kundera, a Czech writer living in exile in Paris, supplies a preface to this, the reissue in a new translation, his first novel, which originally appeared in Czechoslovakia in 1967 during the hopeful days of the so-called "Prague spring"; and in his preface Mr. Kundera disdains the idea that *The Joke* is an anti-Stalinist novel, insisting instead that "*The Joke* is a love story!" One of the least comforting of a critic's jobs is to tell an author that he has his own

[3] THE JOKE, by *Milan Kundera*. Trans. by *Michael Henry Heim*. Harper & Row. $14.95.

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book wrong, but I think this is true in the instance of Mr. Kundera, whose novel, in my view, is about how all-pervasive politics renders love, friendship, and all that is both quotidian and eternal nearly impossible.

The title of Mr. Kundera's novel is a quadruple, perhaps quintuple entendre. At the center of the novel is one Ludvik Jahn, a young Party man, suspected of harboring "traces of individualism," who is soon enough stripped of his Party membership and his university job and sent off to work in penal mines, all because he mailed a postcard to a girl that read: "Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky! Ludvik." It was intended as a joke, yet, as another character in the novel says, ". . . no great movement designed to change the world can bear to be laughed at or belittled. Mockery is a rust that corrodes all it touches." Freud said that there were no jokes, but it has been the totalitarian regimes of our age that are never kidding.

Fifteen years later, now released from his servitude in the mines, Ludvik plans revenge on the Party member chiefly responsible for ruining his life. His plan is to seduce the man's wife, thereby cuckolding and humiliating him. Meanwhile, through flashback and through a contrapuntal narration that has four different characters telling the story, we are given an account of Ludvik's life in the mines, of his abortive attempt to seduce an innocent young girl who is later punished for stealing flowers off graves, and of his accomplishment of his revenge. As the plot works itself out, vengeance, unlike Jell-O, turns out not to be a dish best served cold. While Ludvik succeeds in seducing his old enemy's wife, his enemy, now involved with a younger woman, is only too pleased to have his wife otherwise occupied. The joke is on Ludvik. Then the woman, learning that she has been ill-used, attempts to take her life by swallowing a bottle of aspirins that turn out to have been a bottle of laxatives. The joke is on her. Not, you might say, many laughs here.

Yet bleak though all this sounds, bleak though on the face of it it is, its bleakness is enlivened by the fact that more than hatred is at work. As Ludvik observes: "But hatred shines too bright a light on things, deprives them of their relief." In the company of Milan Kundera one is in more than the company of a victim—one is in the company of an artist. The level of observation in this novel written by a then quite young man is already very high. "The very thought of a generation mentality (the pride of the herd) has always repelled me," Ludvik thinks, and earlier he notes: "A man may ask anything of a woman, but unless he wishes to appear a brute, he must make it possible for her to act in harmony with her deepest self-deceptions." In his preface Kundera asks that his book be taken for "what it has always meant to be: *merely* a novel." It is not so simple, I fear. It begins to seem that the great sad central experience of our century has been to live under one or another tyranny,

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and it begins to seem as if the great heroes of the age are those men and women who exhibit their courage not only by living through it but by writing well about it. Once having done so, one cannot, alas, claim to have written "*merely* a novel." After all, one of the many crimes of the totalitarian regimes of our day is that they have taken the "merely" out of life.

I do not read Czech but the translation of *The Joke*, judged as English composition, seems to me of a fairly high order. As for Yiddish, in which Chaim Grade's *Rabbis and Wives*[4] was originally written, I think it fair to say that I know only enough of that language to fool the Gentiles but not enough to talk to real Jews. I bring up translation because I suspect it is owing to translation that I have hitherto read so little of Chaim Grade (pronounced Grad-a). If one writes in Yiddish, or for that matter in any minority or small-nation language, one is absolutely dependent for one's reputation on one's translators. I am told that this applies especially to Yiddish, where translation into English is said to lapse easily into sentimentality. I am told, further, that the story of Chaim Grade's literary career is that he never found his translator until now, with the publication of *Rabbis and Wives*. Chaim Grade died, at age seventy-two, not long before this book appeared. This makes for a sadness characteristic of a certain kind of Jewish story: justice arriving at the door simultaneously with death.

How important translation is to a writer such as Grade, who began as a poet, becomes clear upon recognition of the precision and power of his language. "When the day was hot and all the stores were closed," he writes, "the hours wore on like thick tar." A dead man's beard "hung down as if slaughtered." A woman's lips snap "like shears" at her husband's naïvete. A rabbi has "kind, tearful eyes and a pair of delicately pious hands fit for leafing through books, for writing complex responsa, or for feeling the gizzard of a chicken in which a housewife has found a splinter, to determine if it was still kosher." This Grade was a writer with a very sure touch.

Chaim Grade wrote about Jewish life in the cities and villages of Lithuania between the two world wars. Grade himself was trained in the yeshivas of Lithuania, and was a member of the Musar movement, which sought the avoidance of all worldly temptation in the hope of achieving ethical perfection. ("In our yeshiva it is said that he who has learned Musar will never again have joy in his life, even after he has stopped studying Musar," says a character in Grade's novel *The Yeshiva*.) Although Grade left this movement in his early twenties, it, apparently, never quite left him, and most of his writing has to do with questions of ethical drama. In this drama moral authority—represented by holy writings, traditions, ethical prescrip-

[4] RABBIS AND WIVES, by *Chaim Grade*. Trans. by *Harold Rabinowitz* and *Inna Hecker Grade*. Knopf. $15.95.

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tions—struggles against human desire and sometimes indeed common sense. The pleasure that his stories provide is that of high moral entertainment.

Rabbis and Wives contains three stories of novella length. In "The Rebbetzin," a woman, disappointed when a brilliant fiancé refuses to marry her, later marries a simple but virtuous rabbi, on whom she foists her ambition, with interesting moral consequences all round. At the center of "Laybe-Layzar's Courtyard" is Rabbi Yoel Weintraub, who didn't like to say no to the poor Jews of his small village and then to those who seek his advice when he gives up his rabbinate and moves to Vilna—and it is a tale about the hopelessness of leniency in ethical matters. "The Oath" is about the ramifications of a dying man's exacting a promise from his son that he will study with an intellectually modest but morally earnest rabbi. There are no tricks to these stories, no puzzles to solve; what we have instead is simple storytelling and an author's love of his characters as well as his mediating intelligence, which in each of his stories makes clear that it is good sense along with piety that God expects.

I love these stories. Does one—to cite the question behind the old Levy's Ryebread advertisements—have to be Jewish to do so? The official answer should be No, followed by bellowing platitudes about art transcending all. I think the true answer should be No—but it probably helps. The emotion that even a nonpracticing Christian feels at the sight of, say, a Michelangelo pietà corresponds, I suspect, with the emotion that a nonpracticing Jew feels upon reading Chaim Grade's stories—it is, in two words, religious emotion.

An episode of adultery comes up in one of the stories in *Rabbis and Wives*, but it takes place off-stage—that is, its sexual detail is not described on the page—so Chaim Grade goes for the horse collar on my Sexual Scorecard. When, four pages into Ward Just's *In the City of Fear*[5] a woman's robe falls open, revealing "red bikini pants and no bra," I thought my pencil would be worn to a stub marking away sexual tricks under my various columns. But not at all, as it turned out. A love affair the novel has, but it is of a calm upper-middle-class sort, and of long standing: "We've lasted longer than most marriages," the man, an Army colonel, says to the woman, the wife of a U.S. Senator. Sex isn't Mr. Just's game. He is after larger things. *In the City of Fear* is yet another attempt to write a great Washington novel. I say yet another attempt, for, so far as I know, there have been no great Washington novels—Henry Adams' *Democracy*, frequently mentioned as the great Washington novel, is in my view badly marred by its author's snobbery. Why we have had no American Trollopes writing Congressional novels remains a mystery.

[5] IN THE CITY OF FEAR, by *Ward Just*. Viking. $14.95.

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As for Ward Just, I found myself, while reading *In the City of Fear*, wanting his novel to be superior. I like the fact that he is not an academic. I like his novelistic ambition, which extends beyond wanting to understand himself to wanting to understand the world. Better still he is not loaded down with received opinions. He can understand what the attractions of war are for men without having to romanticize war; he doesn't assume the military, or anyone having anything to do with it, is loathsome. He knows cities, in this particular case the city of Washington, in which for the most part his novel is set. He knows it in large and in little. He knows its sociology and he knows it in its power relations; he has a feel for its tone and for its temper. Of Washington, a character in *In the City of Fear* remarks: "It is probably the least anti-Semitic city in America, perhaps the world outside the dear state of Israel itself. And of course the reverse is also true! There is no Semitism either, no Hassidim with sidecurls and black hats, no Seders, no Sabbath, no menorah in the parlor, no ghetto tenements, no *memento mori*, no *Jews*."

Mr. Just, then, is not without his ample virtues. And yet his novel, riddled with fine touches though it is—he is very good on lawyers and government, on journalism and government, on the nontransient class of Georgetown insiders who between elections run the government—and yet his novel seems to me curiously unfocused. The book is supposed to be about what the Vietnam War did to life in Washington, to the President and on down. But in the book the particular goes oddly vague, the boldly outlined grows blurry. The novel examines the influence of the war on personal relationships and political opinion through shifting points of view and by means of an interweaving narrative in which the thread of one character's life runs into that of the lives of two or three or more other characters. Yet, as not infrequently occurs in ambitious narratives of this kind, the whole turns out in the end to seem less than the sum of its parts. *In the City of Fear* is finally a flop, however noble a flop. But then Ward Just is not the first man to be defeated by Vietnam—or, for that matter, by Washington either.

With John Fowles's *Mantissa*[6] we are back to serious Sexual Scorecard action. "The curse of fiction," remarks one character in this book to the other, who asks: "Which is?" To which he replies "All those boring stretches between the sexy bits." The man who is talking is a novelist named Miles Green, and the person he is talking to is his Muse. The opening chapter of *Mantissa* is given over to a lengthy episode of *ménage à trois*; there is also a bit of straight fornication, a rape of a maiden by a satyr (clearly goes into the "Other" column), and reference made more than once to a stunt named "the Belgian fork," which is never described. *Mantissa*, as bright readers will have gathered, is the sort of literary self-indulgence

[6] MANTISSA, by *John Fowles*. Little, Brown. $13.95.

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that, if the author be of a certain standing, is dignified by the label *jeu d'esprit.*

I seem to have a small but very real talent for reading the wrong John Fowles novels; at any rate, I continue to miss his popular works: I took a pass on *The Collector* and read *The Magus,* passed on *The Ebony Tower* and read *Daniel Martin,* missed *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and now have read *Mantissa. The Magus* was a greatly labyrinthine book, though with no light at the end of the labyrinth; *Daniel Martin* was a bloat of a book, portentous and pretentious; *Mantissa* . . . how describe *Mantissa*? Well, it is rather like hearing someone tell a very long joke, an ethnic joke, say, and as he goes along he gets a number of the accents wrong, he goes into rather more detail than is needed, everyone in his audience is frightfully bored, and suddenly you are hoping that the joke will have a splendid punch line, which will pull this evident disaster out of the fire and save the day, but, by God, it doesn't—in fact, it just ends, to the embarrassment of everyone except the man who told the joke: he seems terribly pleased.

Such, then, is *Mantissa,* an extended conversation between a contemporary novelist and his Muse. When the book is not being excessively cute—to be simply cute is bad enough—it is meant to be a discussion of the situation of serious modern fiction. Some solid shots are fired at modern—read: structural, semiological—criticism: "Our priority now is mode of discourse, function of discourse, status of discourse," says our novelist to his Muse. "Its metaphoricality, its disconnectedness, its totally ateleological self-containedness." And he tells her earlier: "Serious modern fiction has only one subject: the difficulty of writing serious modern fiction." John Fowles's elaborate definitions of the problems of the serious modern novel remind me of nothing so much as Jean-François Revel's remark that we do not need any more definitions of utopian socialism but what we need are examples of it. Enough discussions of the problems of the serious modern novel; let's have more serious modern novels.

"It's a vile job, sifting the contemporary." So wrote Conrad Aiken to his English friend John Freeman. The line kept popping into my head as I approached the reading of Jill Robinson's *Dr. Rocksinger and The Age of Longing.*[7] Clearly, Miss Robinson's is a novel about the way we live now. Since I try very hard *not* to live the way we live now, it was to me at once a book of great interest and repulsive. Miss Robinson's novel bears a blurb from Ann Beattie, the literary goddess of the group that I have come to think of as the "hippoisie"—that amalgam of hippie and bourgeois culture that now rides high among the educated classes still under forty in America.

The heroine of *Dr. Rocksinger etc.* is Margot Spinning, whose pro-

[7] DR. ROCKSINGER AND THE AGE OF LONGING, by *Jill Robinson.* Knopf. $13.95.

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fessional name (she has a radio talk show) is Margot Fox; she is thirty-eight, the mother of two adolescent children, and mightily screwed up. She is a many-married woman, ambitious, who lives with her children in a town in Connecticut where "half this town is drinking itself to death and the other half is recovering in these AA groups." Kids and adults are "doing" drugs of all sorts; and her own son, she learns in the course of the novel, is dealing cocaine. A heavy air of anxiety hangs over the book. The characters in it tend to be, as they say nowadays, "very aware," but aware above all that they are unable to do anything about all the problems they are so very aware of. A characteristic line from Miss Robinson's heroine runs: "So here we were talking about why we couldn't talk about what we were talking about." As I say, the way we—make that *they*—live now.

The main narrative of *Dr. Rocksinger and The Age of Longing* is not one I find very convincing. It has to do with Margot Spinning reconciling her ambition with her parental responsibilities and these with her love for a younger man, a rock singer on his way to glory days. Miss Robinson is, in my view, less good on *Dr. Rocksinger* than on *The Age of Longing*, by which I mean on that peculiar set of expectations that one can cherish only in an age such as ours—an age of what seems like endless possibilities. "In possibility," wrote Kierkegaard, "everything is possible. Hence in possibility one can go astray in all possible ways. . . ." And nowhere does the possible seem more enticing than in the world where art, money, and publicity are so intertwined that one can scarcely tell one from the other. On her talk show Margot is at the center of this world.

> There had been two postcards in the mailbox. And more invitations again, openings, shows. Producers, directors and stars had been coming in for interviews; such eager anticipation of the hits of the fresh season had seemed to promise. Artists and dealers were bustling along Madison Avenue; designers wrapped in tweeds, glowing with the success of irresistible trends; restaurants had filled with people glancing about, casing each other for news, what to read now, to see now, to wear now, to serve at little dinners with the fresh fall gossip.

Margot's is a world where at a party one does something called "working the room"; where the restaurants serve food that a character refers to as "these expensive little flower arrangements" in places "that look like beauty parlors"; where a former husband can tell his ex-wife: "I'm a little like one of those playboys Franchot Tone used to do so well. I like to stay up late, dress with style and never be married to a middle-aged woman." This madness is the world that Jill Robinson really knows; and she limns it with a sure—and deadly—touch. R. P. Blackmur once said of Auden's poetry that it "adds to the sum of available reality." Miss Robinson's novel adds, for me, to "the sum of available unreality."

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On the Sexual Scorecard Miss Robinson earns four ticks under the column straight fornication, with one tick under the column Other for a little number that is described as "Ride 'em cowboy." In Mario Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*[8] scoring difficulties arose, chiefly because Mr. Vargas Llosa describes sex, if it need be described, in the way that I prefer it described—with plenty of leeway, that is, for the imagination. Thus:

> Despite the bureaucratic frustration of the day, it was an intense and beautiful wedding night, during which, in that old bed that screeched like a cat as we embraced and was no doubt crawling with fleas, we made love several times, with a fire reborn again and again, and as our hands and lips taught us to know each other and give each other pleasure, we told each other that we loved each other, that we would never lie to, cheat on, or leave each other. When they knocked on our door—we'd asked them to wake us at seven— . . . we were still lying there awake, naked and curled up together on the quilt with the green diamond pattern, dizzy and drowsy with pleasure, looking at each other gratefully.

In literary criticism, if not necessarily in politics, this is the age of the Good Neighbor Policy. Latin American writers are a very hot item, as everyone knows. So take a Latin American writer to lunch—while you're there, give him a Nobel Prize. What is behind this rage for Latin American writing? Can it be the feelng that American novelists are no longer providing much of any interest for their countrymen to read—or for critics to write about? Perhaps so. Meanwhile, for myself, I must say I have not exactly been bowled over by this writing. Borges, if it is not ethnocentric to say so, scarcely seems so much a Latin American as a European writer. Gabriel Garcia Marquez—on the basis of my having read but one of his novels—is not my glass of ouzo. Manuel Puig, two of whose novels I have read, does not light my fire either. Last time I wrote a *Hudson Review* fiction chronicle I reviewed another Latin American novel, and now I can recall neither the novelist's name nor what his book was about; all I can remember is that the book featured a crucifix which a wooden Jesus kept climbing up and down, which was not my idea of a good time either.

All the pleasanter, therefore, to be able to report that Mario Vargas Llosa seems to me a splendid writer. I find this all the more impressive because *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* is a novel about writing, perhaps the least promising of subjects. But art conquers all, and art Mr. Vargas Llosa has very much at his command. His novel is about an eighteen-year-old aspiring novelist who writes news for a Lima radio station and who has the complicated fortune

[8] AUNT JULIA AND THE SCRIPTWRITER, by *Mario Vargas Llosa*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.50.

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of having fallen in love with his thirty-two-year-old aunt (by marriage). While he is working at the radio station, an extraordinarily fecund scriptwriter, a most odd little Bolivian named Pedro Camacho, is hired to write and direct a number of radio soap operas. *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* tells the story of young Mario's difficulties in literature and in love and these are connected in an elegantly subtle way with the work of the scriptwriter, samples of whose work are provided between chapters of Mario's adventures.

At page 120 in the novel, I made a note: "How much pleasure does sheer storytelling give?" Then I answered it: "Quite a bit." For a good part of Mr. Vargas Llosa's novel is sheer storytelling. But then things get out of hand for the scriptwriter, whose memory goes and who cannot seem to keep the various characters from his various soap operas straight, so that a character who has been killed in his three o'clock soap opera might show up a few days later in his five o'clock soap opera. Mario is told by the owner of the station, "You're his friend: pass the word on to him to cut out those modernist gimmicks, or else he's liable to end up without a job." There is much high good humor in Mr. Vargas Llosa's pages, and endless lovely little touches, many of them showing the influence of personal experience on writing. He is also very fine on the subject of Peru, not only giving a reader a true feel for the country but making clear what, in our day, is the authentic definition of provinciality as it is found in the world's backwater countries: what provinciality turns out to be, we learn from Mario Vargas Llosa, is not rusticity but sixth-rate imitations of third-rate things. But there is nothing sixth- or third- or even second-rate about Mr. Vargas Llosa.

The reigning cliché about the late Barbara Pym is that she is the Jane Austen of our age. The writer she most reminds me of, though, is not a novelist at all but the Reverend Sydney Smith, the *Edinburgh Review* essayist, who once advised a friend suffering from depression, among other things, to keep good blazing fires, be as busy as you can, attend to the effects coffee and tea produce upon you, and take short views of human life—"not further than dinner or tea." The heroine of Barbara Pym's *No Fond Return of Love*[9] says at one point in the novel, "I always find that if I read a nice soothing book it sends me off to sleep," and, earlier, she thinks, "Life's problems are often eased by hot milky drinks."

Not, I hasten to say, that Miss Pym wrote nice soothing books that are the literary equivalent of hot milky drinks. One of Miss Pym's novels, *Quartet in Autumn*, which takes up the subject of growing old, is quite terrifying. She has a very sharp edge, and it cuts cleanly. Of a character in *No Fond Return of Love* who thinks, "People always know where they are with me," Miss Pym notes, "It never occurred to her that people might not always want to know such things." She is death on little smugnesses, falsely earned feelings of

[9] NO FOND RETURN OF LOVE, by *Barbara Pym*. E. P. Dutton. $12.95.

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virtue. She is a writer to whom one has to pay the strictest attention. "Oh, that's all right," says a character who has just been told something rather brutal by another character. "It's better when people say what they really think." The other character replies: "Is it? How could we ever carry on with our everyday life if we did that?" This second character, speaking for Miss Pym, is of course quite right.

Barbara Pym is a comedian who can make one care about her comic creations—no small feat. Philip Larkin once said about her, in writing to his own editor at Faber & Faber, a firm which had just turned down what was then Miss Pym's most recent novel: "I like to read about people who have done nothing spectacular, who aren't beautiful and lucky, who try to behave well in the limited field of activity they command, but who can see, in little autumnal moments of vision, that the so-called 'big' experiences of life are going to miss them; and I like to read about such things presented not with self pity or despair or romanticism, but with realistic firmness and even humour." That is a quite precise description of every Barbara Pym novel I have ever read.

No Fond Return of Love is about a woman, Dulcie Mainwaring, of the middle-class and of early middle-age who works as an indexer and literary odd-jobs lady. She had been courted by a younger man, who works in an art gallery in London, but that is now over. She does not think of herself as either a romantic or a disappointed figure. She contents herself with observing others with the clearest possible eye. She is occasionally rueful: "But then life is often cruel in small ways, isn't it?" she reflects at one point; and at another she notes, "It was a little upsetting to see what one might have been." She has accustomed herself to take pleasure in the small things of life: flowers, nice food, holidays. " 'People blame one for dwelling on trivialities,' said Dulcie, 'but life is made up of them. And if we've had one great sorrow or one great love, then who shall blame us if we only want the trivial things?' "

Like poetry, Barbara Pym plots do not paraphrase. Besides, it is not what happens but how it is told that matters. As Dulcie Mainwaring has it: " 'The extraordinary thing is that these things have always been so, and yet it's only our knowing about them that has made them real.' " When you read a Barbara Pym novel you feel stupid for having let so much about ordinary life slip by you, and fortunate for having been reminded, by this extremely artful writer, of all that you might otherwise have missed. When you have read a Barbara Pym novel you feel a little smarter about life.

As for Miss Pym's performance on my Sexual Scorecard: no hits, no rapes, no vulgar errors. Too much of interest is going on in her novels for her characters to take time out to crawl into bed with each other. The very thought is preposterous. Detailed description of sex in Barbara Pym? One is likelier to come across a character in Dante wearing a Sony Walkman.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Murches of the World, Unite! You Have Nothing to Lose But Your Praties!

THE ENGLISH HAD THEIR REVOLUTION EARLY (with a brief bloodless coda a generation after), decided they didn't like it, and never had another. The French had theirs not only late but in a stupendous mind-boggling dose, and through much of the next century needed a fix every decade or so: during "this remarkably turbulent era," notes William H. Sewell, Jr., "[there were] three major revolutions (1789, 1830, 1848) . . . [and] ten changes of constitution." Yet the first and original, the "French Revolution" itself, seemed like the Big Bang of creation, the beginning of history, no turning back or duplicating, Day One of Year One not just by vainglorious official edict. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive," recalled Wordsworth long after the grand event he had seen a bit of as an awe-struck tourist when young, "But to be young was very Heaven!" English intellectuals have always looked wistfully across the Channel for excitement, and what could be more exciting than the French Revolution? Hardly anything at all for Wordsworth—

> O times,
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance!
> When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime enchantress—to assist the work,
> Which then was going forward in her name! . . .
> Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
> Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
> But in the very world, which is the world
> Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all!

—or, even nowadays, hardly anything at all more exciting for the latest American historian telling it in prose:

> Meanwhile, the king's flight greatly increased the possibility of armed intervention by the hostile monarchies of Europe. From the summer of 1791 to the summer of 1794, Paris was in a state of almost permanent political crisis. The Assembly's declaration

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of war in April 1792 definitively launched the radical phase of the Revolution. The war quickly turned against the French, and the factionalism of Paris and the Assembly was intensified by accusations of treason and fears of the invading armies. The Parisian populace not unreasonably considered the king guilty of treason to the Revolution. On August 10, 1792, as Prussian and Austrian troops advanced on Paris, they carried out a second Revolution, deposing the king, establishing a new municipal government, and forcing the Assembly to call a new constituent assembly, known as the Convention. On September 21, 1792, the Convention met and declared France a republic. By the end of 1792, French armies had driven the invaders from French soil, and early the next year Louis XVI was executed. But the crisis of the Revolution was far from over. During the next year and a half the war continued without pause; huge counterrevolutionary revolts took place in the Vendée and in Marseille, Lyons, and Bordeaux; and the Parisian populace, in alliance with Robespierre and the Jacobins, repeatedly intervened in the affairs of the Convention to push the Revolution to ever more extreme and energetic measures. This was the period of the "reign of terror," when the Parisian sections and the Committee of Public Safety horrified Europe by their intrepid cruelty and miraculously saved the Revolution from what seemed certain defeat.[1]

Furthermore it's *Allons, enfants de la patrie* till as late as 1871 because all's to do over and over again—intrepid cruelty at the ready, secular miracles in reserve—to rescue whichever revolution is occurring at the moment as well as to compose still another statement of eternal and irrefragable principles in time to get it run off the press and out on the street (which is streaming with the blood of martyrs) before the newest revolutionary committee fades and falls.

The best the English could do in emulation was the short-lived Chartist movement of the 1830s and '40s, whose statement of principles was known as The People's Charter, "the outline of an act of parliament drawn up by a committee of the London Working Men's Association, and six members of parliament; . . . [it] embraces the six cardinal points of Radical Reform . . . : 1. Universal suffrage—2. Annual Parliaments—3. Vote by [secret] Ballot—4. Equal Representation—5. Payment of Members [of Parliament]—6. No Property Qualification" (from a Chartist pamphlet quoted in *Chartism and the Chartists*, by David Jones). Chartists preferred petitions to threats of mayhem because, as they explained somewhat fussily, "By that means you will unite public opinion in your favour, and effect a more widespread and complete organization than you have yet accomplished." Their first petition, the outcome of over five hundred

[1] WORK AND REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, by *William H. Sewell, Jr.* Cambridge University Press. $35.95.

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meetings that collected 1,280,000 signatures, was rejected by Parliament in 1839. In 1842 a second petition with three million signatures was trundled up (in a single pasted-together roll! which required sixteen men to carry it into the House of Commons) and rejected by a vote of 287–49, whereupon according to a Chartist onlooker "the lads and lasses walked thoughtfully away." "By 1845 the idea of a genuinely *national* petition" arose, with an objective of five million signatures: "the mood was, 'with five million signatures and a huge demonstration [peaceful of course] who can refuse us?' A British Parliament could . . ." and in 1847 did; and that was the end of Chartism. True, the six cardinal points were granted in whole or in part by acts of Parliament within a quarter-century; but the Chartists were a tame bunch, no intrepid or even tepid cruelty, not even a reign of terror, they laid down no eternal principles and universal beliefs for the edification and advancement of mankind. Indeed these "working men"—not even workers—worked at setting up meetings and collecting signatures but not at the historically primary task of developing a class consciousness: Patrick Joyce points out with a touch of exasperation that as late as the 1890s "the [English] working class mistrusted itself, refusing to support its own kind but happy to defer to gentlemen. The poorer people were[,] the happier they were to be represented by their superiors"[2]; writing from England to Marx after the 1868 elections, Engels reported that in the factory areas "not a single working-class candidate had the ghost of a chance, but my Lord Thumnoddy or any *parvenu* snob could have the workers' votes with pleasure." Pathetic, putting your trust in others. But then, as Santayana observed in his essay "English Liberty in America," "English liberty is so trustful! It moves by a series of checks, mutual concessions, and limited satisfactions; it counts on chivalry, sportsmanship, brotherly love, and on that rarest and least lucrative of virtues, fair-mindedness: it is a broad-based, stupid, blind adventure, groping towards an unknown goal. Who but an Englishman would think of such a thing! A fanatic, a poet, a doctrinaire, a dilettante—any one who has a fixed aim and clear passions—will not relish English liberty." Whereas the French in 1789 "aimed at establishing society once for all on some eternally just principle, and at abolishing all traditions, interests, faiths, and even words that did not belong to their system. Liberty, for all these pensive or rabid apostles of liberty, meant liberty for themselves to be just so, and to remain just so forever, together with the most vehement defiance of anybody who might ask them, for the sake of harmony, to be a little different. They summoned every man to become free in exactly their own fashion, or have his head cut off."

[2] WORK, SOCIETY AND POLITICS, by *Patrick Joyce*. Rutgers University Press. $30.00.

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Sewell has a nostalgic fondness for the good old days of red riot and the workers' dawn (when bliss was it to be alive); but the facts of his very informative study weigh more on the side of Santayana than of Robespierre. Some of the facts emphasize that France of the old regime wasn't a centralized and Argus-eyed tyranny; that tradition, privilege, and power weren't all in the hands of the king and nobles; that for instance every trade or calling had its "corporation" (guild) with "rights, dignities, and obligations" ratified by royal decree: a state within the state; a "body" that tempered the wind to its individual members: university teachers, lawyers, doctors, tavernkeepers, shoemakers, silversmiths—

> the entire French kingdom was composed of a hierarchy of such units—from corporations, seigneuries, and parishes at the bottom, through cities, provinces, and the three estates of the realm at an intermediate level, to the monarchy at the top. Trade corporations were recognized units of a corporate society, and as such they exhibited a jealous attachment to the particular privileges that defined them as a corps, a carefully defined system of mutually interdependent and hierarchically arranged ranks, a detailed regulation and surveillance of their members, and a pervasive solidarity that bound them together as a spiritual and moral community.
>
> Corporations, like all the other bodies that made up the French kingdom, were assigned a public role in the functioning of the state. Trade communities were given wide public powers, powers that extended far beyond the limits of their statutory privileges. Corporations were made responsible not only for paying their own special fees to the crown but often for assessing and collecting all the other taxes paid by their members. Until the seventeenth century, service in the militia was organized by corporation. Corporations were also electoral units, a function they still exercised in the elections for the Estates General in 1789. . . .

(The Estates General was a barely hypothetical representative assembly that, though the king was bound to consult it whenever he wished to impose new taxes, hadn't been convoked or consulted since 1614—"the crown had in the interim imposed all sorts of new taxes by royal fiat"—and when Louis XVI convoked it for the first time in a hundred and seventy-five years it responded at once with words and deeds that led ineluctably to his dethronement and execution; but those are the breaks.)

Comes the Revolution. "Swept by a torrent of magnanimous emotion [is Sewell's way of setting us up], the Assembly annihilated the privileges of the old regime amid raptures of enthusiasm and tears of joy. . . . France was no longer to be composed of assorted and infinitely various corporate bodies—estates, orders, communities,

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cities, provinces—each with its own distinct 'special privileges.' On the night of August 4 [, 1789] these bodies and their privileges were sacrificed to the 'close union' of the nation." It took a while longer before all trade corporations were explicitly abolished too (at first the artisans, fervid supporters of the Revolution, didn't understand why they should give up their age-old guilds, but eventually they came to understand that everything age-old had to go): "The republic . . . entailed not only the direct exercise of popular sovereignty but a single, unified popular will. . . . For citizens to organize themselves on the basis of particular trades would be to form partial wills that would only conflict with the general will and hence would be counterrevolutionary." (In the early days after the Russian Revolution Trotsky opposed the establishment of labor unions on the presumption that they would be superfluous in a "workers' state"; but Lenin rejoined that the Soviet Union was a workers' state only *in posse* and that therefore, at least to begin with, the workers would need some corporate protection against it. Lenin prevailed here as elsewhere, but the Leviathan state he founded chewed up instantly all the little paper tigers he teased it with.) In Revolutionary France who could doubt that only counterrevolutionaries (like the Chartists fifty years later in England) would prefer to do their voting in secret? Correct voting was "by acclamation," i.e. unanimous cheers and applause whenever the names of the correct candidates were announced. Political denunciation was another public responsibility: as one republican asserted, "far from being a moral crime, [it] has become a virtue and a duty . . . the safeguard of liberty in a popular republic." Citizens were denounced for speaking "ironically" or appearing "haughty and proud" or wearing old-regime long hair. Against the really peskily contumacious, there might be (in Sewell's delicate phrase) "ever more extreme and energetic measures": "as a sans-culotte in the section de l'Unité put it, guillotines should be constructed 'on all the street-corners of Paris, and at the doors of all merchants, so that goods may be bought cheaply.' " The goal was categorical conformity and uniformity: "the annihilation of any sense of common interest intermediate between the individual and the nation. Loyalties to provinces, estates, orders, communities, corporations, all were to vanish before the interests of individual citizens and the supreme loyalty of every citizen to the nation." Sewell mentions Tocqueville only to scold him for finding fault with the proclamations of the French workers during the 1830 Revolution (which Tocqueville had to live through); but in *Democracy in America* (written just a few years later) Tocqueville sums up more lucidly and more even-handedly than Sewell ever does the fatal doubleness of the 1789 Revolution, in which

> there were two impulses in opposite directions, which must never be confounded; the one was favorable to liberty, the other to des-

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> potism. Under the ancient monarchy, the king was the sole author of the laws; and below the power of the sovereign, certain vestiges of provincial institutions, half destroyed, were still distinguishable. These provincial institutions were incoherent, ill arranged, and frequently absurd; in the hands of the aristocracy, they had sometimes been converted into instruments of oppression. The Revolution declared itself the enemy at once of royalty and of provincial institutions; it mingled in indiscriminate hatred all that had preceded it,—despotic power and the checks of its abuses; and its tendency was at once to republicanize and to centralize. This double character of the French Revolution is a fact which has been adroitly handled by the friends of absolute power. Can they be accused of laboring in the cause of despotism, when they are defending that centralized administration which was one of the great innovations of the Revolution? In this manner, popular acceptance may be united with hostility to the rights of the people, and the secret slave of tyranny may be the professed lover of freedom.

Tocqueville saw all around him, at the very moment when he was writing, the clear and present danger which was the legacy of the Revolution: indiscriminate hatred of the past, no buffers, no intermediaries, no local preoccupations, no differences of opinion hence no differences of feeling, no distinctions of status such as the never-to-be-too-strenuously-execrated one between aristocrat and commoner, no distractions, no privacy, nowhere to hide. In an unprecedented burst of political inspiration the ideologues of the Revolution had invented the totalitarian state.

Sewell himself, though he presents enough evidence and a century and a half later in another country needn't be as cautious as Tocqueville, doesn't draw this conclusion (as Tocqueville would if he knew the twentieth-century word). Rather, he's more concerned with the evolving of "what would today be called a class-conscious workers' movement"; so is Joyce for the other side of the Channel: both contend that it was independent and self-motivated; both wish it had happened more massively, more influentially, and sooner, and both try to show why it didn't. Sewell stresses the French Revolution's Lockean (by way of Diderot and the Encyclopedists) commitment to "real" property—for all its violence and slogans it was a bourgeois revolution—and its failure to recognize labor as the most important kind of property. Liberty, equality, and fraternity (Locke's less sentimental triad was "life, liberty, and property") meant with reference to production a free market and labor's right to work; and no such self-serving bodies as the anyhow impudently antique trade corporations, which restricted the free market by excluding everyone but their members from the right to work, would be tolerated. Thus the French artisans and craft workers found

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themselves in the position of having fewer collective rights under the Revolution of which they had been the fighting vanguard and majority than under the regime they had overthrown.

By the time of the 1830 Revolution, however, they had learned what they must do: capture and convert the rhetoric of the Great Revolution. The workers' paper *L'Artisan* began by deflecting the "language of servitude and aristocracy to relations between workers and the bourgeoisie. Here a venerable revolutionary opposition was used to place worker-bourgeois relations in a new moral frame and to cast as privileged tyrants precisely that class which had been exalted as citizen-proprietors by the legal and political reforms of the Revolution." The trick was to reverse the Revolutionary understanding of the relations between property and labor. The Revolution had adopted the view of the Encyclopedists, who, honoring Locke and their own bourgeois instincts, soft-pedaled the differences between makers and owners, thought politically rather than economically, regarded every individual as primarily a property-accumulator who must be protected against confiscation or high taxes. The Encyclopedists had therefore given the legal and political precedence to property, which they defined as the fundamental right of a person in society, and which, whoever happened to have it, must not be (as by tyrants) expropriated: "In states where the rules of reason are followed, *properties* of private individuals are under the protection of the laws." No doubt, according to the formulation of the Encyclopedists, labor had chronological precedence as the personal agent that made and acquired property, but there was at the same time no doubt that like a good little impersonal abstraction labor would never challenge the legal and political precedence of the autonomous, impersonal, and inhumanly permanent things which it had made and acquired and which after all anybody (with a bank account) was free to accumulate to his heart's content. In 1830, however, the worker-editors of *L'Artisan* saw the kilometer-wide gap in this logic and walked straight through it: If according to the Encyclopedists and the Revolution labor was the source of property, then no subsequent possessor had a claim to property, it could be only by usurpation or fraud that property was separated from and valued above the labor—which belonged to the laborers—by whose means it had been made or acquired; what a worker made was his, not his boss's: "our industry, which you have exploited for so long, is ours alone." "*L'Artisan* turns revolutionary discourse back on itself," as Sewell comments, "invoking men's ownership of labor as an argument *against* the claims of property owners, who are pictured as unjustly 'exploiting' labor" (the "pejorative usage of 'exploit' . . . was still novel in 1830"). The labor invested in property is untransferable. Neither labor nor any other form of property can be bought from a laborer; it can only be stolen: so said the workers. This is one of the momentous shifts in the history of Western ideas.

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Proudhon didn't declare till ten years later that "Property is theft"; Marx, who was twelve years old in 1830, very likely hadn't yet become a foreign correspondent for French workers' newspapers: the theorists who worked it out were the staff of *L'Artisan*, the workers themselves. It was also the workers themselves who chose to "reinterpret" these aspects of Revolutionary rhetoric rather than discard the rhetoric altogether, their reasons being that (1) it was still gospel to the French populace; and (2) it had conferred on "The Third Estate"—i.e. "the commoners," the makers of the Revolution, consisting of the till-now-ideologically-indivisible citizen-proprietors and citizen-workers—their status as "the sovereign people of France," a status to which the citizen-workers now at last laid exclusive claim, convinced that it had anyway always been theirs alone not only because of their unique social usefulness as the sole true producers of wealth but because they had always been the up-'n'-at-'em majority on the people's side of the barricades. Of course, once they were established without partners or rivals as the sovereign people (and their former co-commoners, the bourgeoisie, transmogrified into the blood-sucking enemies of the people), they would be able to do pretty much as they pleased about unions and closed shops and such. In any case the Revolutionary rhetoric to which, while reversing its meaning on a crucial issue, they reaffirmed their unimpaired loyalty was indispensable to them because it

> validated them as legitimate actors on the public stage and endowed them with the power of comprehensible speech. It was only as the sovereign people, whose supreme utility as the producers of all wealth underlay the supreme patriotism they had demonstrated in the July [1830] insurrection, that they could command the attention of the government and the governing classes. The editors of *L'Artisan*, and legions of workers after them, understood this perfectly.

Having subdued the rhetoric of the Revolution to their own special interests, the workers became uniquely and by self-acclamation "the people"; but, because they hadn't in fact any better claim on the designation than pickpockets or duchesses, they could maintain the imposture only by turning it into theater, as "legitimate actors on the public stage"—an image which, though for Sewell it isn't pejorative here, nevertheless suggests some of the political possibilities of a misappropriated and hyperbolical rhetoric. Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains! Sewell intends to show us how clever it was of the workers to figure everything out for themselves; that theorists and agitators like Marx and Engels took their cue from the workers, not the other way round; but nobody should feel very smug about excogitating and perpetuating such language, greater though its pizazz may be than the

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Chartists' "By that means you will unite public opinion in your favour, and effect a more widespread and complete organization than you have yet accomplished." Rhetorical differences matter.

Actors are better at acting than action, and another difference between France and England during the nineteenth century was that the factory system developed much faster in England. Or there were advantageous conditions: the Industrial Revolution had begun much earlier in England; there hadn't been anything like the French series of political eruptions and repressions; the population between 1816 and 1900 increased by three hundred and fifty per cent! so that there were three and a half times as many customers for machine-made goods, while in France during the entire century the population increased by less than forty-five per cent. But the development of the factory system in England didn't result, as might have been expected, in the development of what Joyce calls "a labourist consciousness." What developed instead of a class split between factory owners and their "operatives" was an affiliation, an almost feudal relationship that involved party politics, family, religion, culture, "self-improvement," schools, recreation, and community affairs as well as the factory. The owners supported, supervised, and participated in a self-sustaining welfare enclave: "deliberate community-building . . . a church here, a school or canteen there, and always the stream of social life that characterised all factories"; "Works dinners and treats, trips to the countryside and the employer's residence, libraries, reading-rooms, canteens, baths, lectures, gymnasia, burial societies and the like were to become the rule rather than the exception among the big employers." Joyce documents and deplores this "new paternalism" in the mines and factories and company towns ("the fiction of unity and interdependence that enabled poverty and inequality to be borne"), though he seems never to have read or heard about the vividest and most complex representation of it, during its last years as it was dying out toward the end of the century, when the patriarchal father gives way to the cost-effective son in the chapter "The Industrial Magnate" of Lawrence's *Women in Love*:

> [Thomas Crich] was a large employer of labour, he was a great mine-owner. And he had never lost this from his heart, that in Christ he was one with his workmen. Nay, he had felt inferior to them, as if they through poverty and labour were nearer to God than he. He had always the unacknowledged belief that it was his workmen, the miners, who held in their hands the means of salvation. To move nearer to God, he must move towards his miners, his life must gravitate towards theirs. They were, unconsciously, his idol, his God made manifest. In them he worshipped the highest, the great, sympathetic, mindless Godhead of humanity.

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But after many years of prosperity and good feeling there's an industry-wide lockout that as a member of the owners' Federation he is compelled to honor, the idle miners riot and set fires, soldiers are called in, and when at length the men go back to work

> it was never the same as before. There was a new situation created, a new idea reigned. Even in the machine, there should be equality. No part should be subordinate to any other part: all should be equal. The instinct for chaos had entered. Mystic equality lies in abstraction, not in having or in doing, which are processes. In function and process, one man, one part, must of necessity be subordinate to another. It is a condition of being. But the desire for chaos had risen, and the idea of mechanical equality was the weapon of disruption which should execute the will of men, the will for chaos.

"Gerald was a boy at the time . . . but he longed to be a man, to fight the colliers. The father, however, was trapped between two half-truths, and broken. He wanted to be a pure Christian, one and equal with all men. He even wanted to give away all he had, to the poor. Yet he was a great promoter of industry, and he knew perfectly [as the worker-editors of *L'Artisan* knew "perfectly" what *they* had to do] that he must keep his goods and keep his authority. . . . He wanted to be a father of loving kindness and sacrificial benevolence. The colliers shouted to him about his thousands a year. . . ." For Gerald the shout is nothing to fret over, it's only the helpless shout of envy from one's natural inferiors:

> As soon as Gerald entered the firm, the convulsion of death ran through the old system. . . . Terrible and inhuman were his examinations into every detail; there was no privacy he would spare, no old sentiment but he would turn it over. The old grey managers, the old grey clerks, the doddering old pensioners, he looked at them and removed them as so much lumber. The whole concern seemed like a hospital of invalid employees. He had no emotional qualms. . . .
>
> "I've a pitiful letter here from Letherington," his father would say, in a tone of deprecation and appeal. "Don't you think the poor fellow might keep on a little longer. I always fancied he did very well."
>
> "I've got a man in his place now, father. He'll be happier out of it, believe me. You think his allowance is plenty, don't you?"
>
> "It is not the allowance that he wants, poor man. He feels it very much, that he is superannuated. Says he thought he had twenty more years of work in him yet."
>
> "Not of the kind of work I want. He doesn't understand."
>
> The father sighed. He wanted not to know any more. He be-

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> lieved the pits would have to be overhauled if they were to go on working. And after all, it would be worst in the long run for everybody, if they must close down. So he could make no answer to the appeals of his old and trusty servants, he could only repeat "Gerald says."

But even the combined Geralds of England weren't able to drive their employees any farther along the road to liberty, equality, and fraternity than closed-shop unions and the bumblingly reformist Labour Party.

If you're wondering why I quote Lawrence rather than Joyce, one reason is that if ever there was a helpful book that answers to Santayana's description of English liberty—"a broad-based, stupid, blind adventure, groping towards an unknown goal"—it's *Work, Society and Politics* (though Patrick Joyce is identified as Lecturer in History at the University of Manchester, those who wish to believe that the English have a genetic talent for writing clear expository prose can take comfort not only from his name but from his dedication "To Rosaleen and Sean"). The book teems with sentences that wring the heart: "It therefore seems apparent that to the extent that hegemony obtained, and the employer's influence delimited and entered into the totality of operative life, and to the degree that ulterior influences were excluded, or else (as in the case of the trade unions) their effect was qualified and minimised, the more likely was it that the dominant characteristic of the deferential relationship would be the affective or 'organic' tie"; "In both Keighley and Bradford, for example, employers expected and received the child labour of their adult workers, employment being secured by the personal application of family members at the mill." One of his pet words is "methodology" (he thinks it means "method"), and he uses it as often as three times per page. Only one of the nine chapters is titled "The New Paternalism" (which includes a Thomas Crich-like citation from a factory-owner, and there are dozens of other comparable citations: "Such riches as resulted from a successful business career I consider myself to hold in trust as God's Steward. I never had any love for money: my wants are few: I live quietly, and seek no wealth. From earliest days the Sermon on the Mount has been my standard of conduct both in personal and business relationships . . ."); but, having labored with pick and headlamp through the darkest recesses of this book, I don't see why seven or eight of the chapters plus the book itself couldn't have the same title: Joyce is incapable of distinguishing between one idea and the next, everything slithers and muddles into everything else, and if all else fails he merely restates or recalls or anticipates material he deals with in another chapter, e.g. "Deference, Dependence and Community" or "Religion and Politics," which are fully as much about the new paternalism as "The New Paternalism" is about def-

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erence, dependence, community, religion, politics, and methodology. Finally, the book—because, I suppose, even the author after writing it couldn't tell what he was getting at—has more typos, and typos more horridly plausible, than any other book I've ever read: "they are chosen for their known political basis [bias]"; "the habit of neighbourhood community, expressed in the terminology of sociology as 'communal socialibility' [is this a typo? in context it looks as probable as anything else]"; "politics of ritutal" (which may have something to do with the methodology of the terminology of sociology); "oligrachic"; "the two established praties" (which looks like the other Joyce); "the peculiar Lancashire addition [addiction] to processions"; "immedicacy"; "Socialist campaingers"; "historal." When I arrived at "the local murches celebrating the [Sunday] schools' centenary in 1880" I was stumped. Then in the O.E.D. I discovered that "murche" is an obsolete word for "dwarf" and I was pleased to imagine the local little people flinging up their tiny pointed hats while under the new paternalism they took their places with the other simple frisky vassals carrying such banners as—I'm not making these up—"Fear God and Honour the Queen" and "Sunday Schools are England's Glory." It took all the spirit out of me when a half-hour later the word "marches," which fits far less interestingly, popped into my head.

England is, or at any rate used to be, the place where a banner reading "Fear God and Honour the Queen" can be carried for fun and pride and with unaggressive conviction in a Sunday-school parade. Voltaire, quintessential Frenchman, feared and despised French absoluteness; he loved England and the English because they lived and let live, they could be governed and they could also govern; and he wouldn't have been delighted by the Revolution that his writings and moral authority had so much to do with bringing about not long after his death.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

The Englishness of It

GEOFFREY KEYNES, THE BIBLIOGRAPHER AND SURGEON, ninety-five years old, has written an account of his long and full life, has given it an appropriately Blakean title, and, after innumerable books presenting the work of others, now this time presents himself to the world.[1] "Unbar the Gates of Memory: look upon me / Not as another, but thy real Self, I am thy Spectre" may not have been a summons to revelation of self in the modern sense, nor even in the very ancient contemplative reflective investigative sense. Sir Geoffrey—he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to medicine—does not explore the roots of self in the record of his many years, neither does he recount a conversion, an unfolding, a flowering, a discovery of direction after floundering in a dark wood, an apology, or a true self emerging from false appearances, as autobiographies often do. Keynes seems always to have been the person he came to be, and the passage of many years which turned the schoolboy into the surgeon and bibliographer simply strengthened those early leanings, those first impressions and strivings, so that the self which speaks from these pages appears merely to have learned more, to have done better, to be placed in increasingly fortunate circumstances which enlarged the opportunities pursued by sensible, methodical and reasonable actions from the very beginning.

What appears simple and sensible in the telling of a life may not of course have been experienced that way—the author is English after all!—but the account of this long life is not concerned with such matters, in fact hardly even recognizes them. Keynes, born in the late years of Victoria's reign, grew up in a Cambridge academic family, but he observes that their family life was warm and agreeable, not marked by the disruptions and antagonisms characteristic of the period. The classic domestic turbulence, rebellion, or flight so often recounted of the Victorian family were not part of Keynes's experience either. The Keynes parents were enlightened: the father, a logician and political economist, a Fellow of Pembroke, was a university official of some eminence who spent his life in academic administration of the older sort, and lived into his nineties; the mother, who also lived into her nineties, was the don's wife, later active in those works of education and social welfare which typi-

[1] THE GATES OF MEMORY, by *Geoffrey Keynes Kt.* Oxford University Press. $24.95.

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cally led from private benevolence to public benefaction—she was a clergyman's daughter, one of the first Newnham students, an intelligent, literate, high-minded mother, wife, daughter, who lived in Cambridge to the end of her days. Harvey Road, where they lived, was a new section of Cambridge in the eighties, named for the great Harvey who had been at Caius in the sixteenth century. Curiously, Keynes does not think *this* association had anything to do with his important work on blood transfusion, although he does see his vocation in the three-year-old child in the nursery, immersed in a book showing the circulation of the blood. The early commitment never wavered, however; he remained always a curious inquiring person of scientific mind, speculative and accumulative rather than experimental or analytical. That his vocation could be traced to a book was also important because bibliography has been almost as continuous and unwavering a commitment in his life as medicine.

The family was genial, kindly, thoughtfully attentive, interested, respectful, encouraging. The parents never insisted, never imposed, never demanded, never rejected, according to Keynes's report. They saw early that their youngest son was marked out for a medical career and their mission was to facilitate it; they saw that he liked to collect things and so the typically late Victorian pursuit of moths and butterflies was encouraged with near professional seriousness—one is reminded here of the family of Leslie Stephen, of Nabokov—and family holidays were spent hunting various European butterflies. There is a charming image of this kind of holiday, when the days would be spent in search of the unusual varieties and the nights in hotel rooms mounting and sorting the day's accumulation. The young entomologist also pursued an interest in fossils, exploring the many gravel pits around Cambridge in the nineties, accumulating bones and stones of prehistoric animals which also had to be labeled and classified. It was excellent training of course. In each of these pursuits the boy's interest was aided by the enlightened parents; indeed, Keynes's father devotes himself to hunting butterflies with an enthusiasm equal to his son's, and there is an endearing photograph showing the two walking under an umbrella in search of specimens. Only one instance is reported that conflicts with that pattern; when young Keynes finished at Rugby, his parents decided that he should spend some time in Germany perfecting a rudimentary knowledge of German. Mrs. Keynes had herself spent a liberating youthful time in Germany, so it was "decreed." The ninety-five-year-old man allows himself only the mildest of retrospective reproofs to his long-dead parents, observing that he has never had occasion to use German but has often missed a fluent French which would have served him better. Still, when young Geoffrey was rescued, it was for an entomological trip to the Engadine.

Cambridge in the eighties was a small lively place, with donkey-

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carts and horse trams and some of the new bicycles, with dinner parties and garden parties, afternoon calls, receptions at the Master's Lodge, with literary parodies, and trips to the Holy Land, with William Morris wallpapers, with Henry Sidgwick and Miss Clough and Mrs. Fawcett and those Masters like Montague Butler and Adolphus Ward, figures of Biblical majesty. Until 1882, Fellows could not marry, so Keynes's father resigned his fellowship at Pembroke; it was to be Geoffrey's college, after Rugby and Germany. Opposite Pembroke was Emmanuel Church, where the Keynes family went every Sunday, their sharp minds attentive to the lengthy sermons. The children were brought into adult discussions, and like other children in similar families published their own paper. Young Geoffrey the archaeologist gave many of his rhinoceros skulls and prehistoric oxen's jawbones to the Cambridge museums, encouraged in his enthusiasms by the Master of Downing and the Woodwardian Professor of Geology. With a friend, he published a journal of their findings; later Geoffrey wrote up one of his finds for a prize essay at Rugby, an essay eventually published as a Supplement to the *Report* of the Natural History Society. Comparable exploits are reported of Maynard. It was the way such children were. At Rugby Geoffrey made the usual important friendships that were to be decisive in his life, chief among them being the close friendship with Rupert Brooke.

After the early chapters, a reader may note the absence of Keynes's genial family from his recorded experiences, although he speaks of "an uncomfortable alienation" from them during the forced exile in Germany. In the account of the Cambridge years, when his family lived within half a mile of Pembroke, there is no mention of his seeing them, nor even of seeing his brother, Maynard, except rarely, although Maynard, at King's, was within a few hundred yards and some of their friendships overlapped. Similarly, Geoffrey's sister, Margaret, had no recorded role in his life in those years, and not much thereafter, and his wife, also a Margaret (and an early friend of his sister's), is allotted less than two pages about herself. Keynes's four sons, his grandsons, and other family members are occasionally mentioned—there are more dons among them and continued Cambridge links—but their emotional importance for the author is not the subject of the book, and they did not have a distinctive role in his life's work.

Keynes's marriage to Margaret Darwin in 1917 ended only with her death in 1974. They had of course known each other as Cambridge children—Margaret was the sister of Gwen Raverat who, in *Period Piece*, has so charmingly recreated that life—and their lives were intertwined in other respects as well: one of Keynes's close scientific friends during his time at Pembroke was Margaret's brother, Charles, a mathematician and physicist, grandson of the great Charles, just as Keynes's sister, Margaret, married another of his

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friends from the Natural Science Club, the physiologist, A. V. Hill. Keynes's life was devoted to medicine and bibliographical interests, and in both of these pursuits, his individuality, patience, persistence, and love of collecting and classifying brought him all possible rewards. New techniques of blood transfusion, the founding of blood banks, the new surgery for breast cancer, hernia and thyroid surgery, thymectomy for the treatment of myasthenia gravis, and other surgical and medical developments gave him the satisfactions of the surgeon's craft. He became a Fellow of all three Royal Medical Colleges, was knighted, was made an Honorary Fellow of the British Academy, and, since his retirement from St. Bartholomew's Hospital, has been called upon to give innumerable memorial lectures in which his historical, medical, and bibliographical interests converge, such as the Harveian Oration (given almost annually since 1658) at the Royal College of Physicians.

It was Rupert Brooke who inspired Keynes's early love of Blake and Donne, and another friend who inspired the love of Sir Thomas Browne, passions which spurred Keynes's bibliophilia and the beginning of that long series of bibliographies for which he is known. Browne was an especially happy discovery, a doctor as well as a writer, and this enthusiasm led to a friendship with the great Sir William Osler, who was himself a Browne collector. The taste for Blake was unusual in 1907—in fact, Keynes's father refused to loan him enough money for one of his purchases—but the manner of indulging it was thoroughly traditional and respectable: the Pembroke student passing the Trinity Street bookshop was profoundly struck by a Blake engraving and then began buying everything of Blake's that he could find. Other friends shared and encouraged his bibliomania and young Keynes came to know the literate scientific and medical people of the time through them. The wonderful David bookstall could be visited, even by students without much money, so long as they knew what they were looking for, and young Keynes the book collector knew as much what he was looking for as he had done ten or fifteen years earlier when he searched for moths and prehistoric bones. It was still a time when old books could be bought cheaply, so the young medical student soon developed a Blake collection of engravings, books, and related works, as well as material relating to Donne and Browne. Other favorite authors were to follow and throughout Keynes's long life books were always being collected, pictures and engravings and manuscripts found and acquired while it was still possible, bibliographies compiled, and editions revised or renewed. Harvey's work was of course collected, then Hazlitt, John Evelyn, Jane Austen, Gibbon, Bishop Berkeley, Timothie Bright, John Ray, and many others. All the while he was advancing in his profession, and also passionately interested in ballet, in wood sculpture, in woodworking, in curious trees such as the *metasequoia* he watched over, and the immense tu-

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lip tree before which he stands in a photograph of 1979. In early days, there had been climbing with George Mallory, the Everest explorer who lost his life in the attempt, and there were the years serving in the First World War, and during the Second, doing surgery at the front, and helping to reorganize some of the medical stations.

It is all very English—the combination of active professional life, equally active avocations, both pursued with intense enthusiasm and intelligence, the striving for and achieving of honors, the benevolent contribution to the profession, to public life, to art and literature. It was the union of power and intelligence throughout a well-favored life in which comfortable and traditional structures accommodated an individual, unusual, even quirky, difficult, sometimes radical temperament. Perhaps what seems especially English is the accommodation rather than the individuality, the structure which enables and facilitates the individuality. Thus, a taste for Blake, Donne, and others could be fitted into the flexible accommodating structure of book-collecting; the interest in unusual or innovative medical procedures could be pursued as a house surgeon in a hospital thriving for eight hundred years on the same old English site. Similarly Maynard Keynes's economic ideas would be entertained while their author was a Fellow of King's or at the India Office or the Peace Conference, or in the pages of the major journals. When Maynard Keynes bought a house in Sussex, it would be one of the properties that had once belonged to Keynes ancestors in the Domesday Survey eight hundred years before. And Geoffrey Keynes now lives only a few miles from the chapel where his great-great-grandfather was Congregational minister. The same names recur throughout the story, from William de Cahanges, who came over with the Conqueror, to the moral and intellectual power of the manufacturers and clergymen and dons. The boy who grew up on Harvey Road lived to give the Harveian oration sixty years later. From the great Henry Fawcett, whose brother married a Keynes cousin, and who, with his wife, the noted feminist, Millicent Fawcett, served as mentors to the Keynes parents, to the young Darwin girl, and the Keynes girl active in welfare and women's causes, with the Jebb niece and the Hopkins daughter, whose father had been the teacher of Kelvin, Clerk Maxwell, and Fawcett himself, there is a tidy and thrifty interweaving that occurs through every generation, prudently reinforcing energies and talents, inescapably bringing to mind Yeats's line about "the best knit to the best."

Two of Keynes's lectures are presented as appendices, one, "Religio Bibliographici," delivered in 1953 to the Bibliographical Society, and the other "The Oslerian Tradition," given in 1968 as the first Oslerian oration at the Royal College of Physicians. Together they provide an excellent summary of Keynes's twin interests in the craft of surgery and the passion of bibliography. The early "hero wor-

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ship" of Rupert Brooke led to the Donne and Blake "entanglement." He speaks of "romance," of the "shock" of discovery, and uses the language of passion "unblushingly" in a special way. The Brownean title and the argument throughout attest to the personal and passionate relation to books of one who resists the systematic claims of analytical scientific bibliography in favor of a humanistic and personally committed pursuit. In his Oslerian oration, Keynes touches on those personal qualities of Osler's which make him an example for medicine, and in this lecture too he proceeds from an account of his personal relation to the matter, finding in Osler's interest in Browne a convergence of his own two passions and an exemplary cultivation of mind and spirit.

The scope of Keynes's reflections necessarily omits much that a contemporary reader might like to know about—the quality of relationships, the texture of family life, the emotional depths, the involvements, the personal conversions and sufferings of a long life. Whether these were experienced with reticence, or in another way, or not experienced, the reader cannot say, and this *religio bibliographici et medici* must not be faulted for not supplying what was apparently not intended to be part of the record. "It is true," says Sir Geoffrey, "that the ordinary life of a surgeon gives him little or no time to spend with his children," and he designates Sundays and holidays as the only available time. That is, time available after a well-organized methodically-spent and punctually-lived day, beginning early, when "booksellers' catalogues can be read at the breakfast table" through the rational ordering of one's time into the evenings, which should be spent at the theatre or ballet. It is intriguing then to find an additional comment on his employment of time and energies: "My sons have often complained that I neglected them during their childhood and I cannot deny this." The Englishness of that remark—!

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RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Poetry Chronicle

IN OUR TIME, a poet, in order to be published, occasionally read, sometimes extravagantly admired, and, most important, to satisfy his own standards, does not *necessarily* have to do anything extraordinarily difficult. The absolute requirements of accomplishment are not comparable to those met by a Houdini or a Blondin, or any competent circus performer, or any performing artist or athlete. Feats of technique and muscle do not produce works of art, but then, the poet does not have to work his way up through training in a demanding medium as a master painter must do. Within his own medium, the poet of today is not asked to match the verbal architecture of an ode by Pindar (nobody ever has that I know of), or even, usually, the easier but still difficult formal versification of the masters of poetry in English.

Be that as it may, the poets are writing; many many of them get published; they are often admired and listened to and sometimes even read; they win quantities of grants and awards. Though we may think that many of them might better have spared their time, and us, and not gone and cluttered up the field, every serious reader has a list of poets whose works, or some of them, he admires very much. Then, if we do not, for the reasons put forward above, find in them the obvious attractions of the "Ode to the West Wind" or "The Lady of Shalott," what do we find to admire? Well, craftsmanship is not dead, it is only different; eye and ear are just as essential as ever; and where these fail, the mind (of all things) may step in, with a fresh idea or new insight, to achieve that most desirable *poiema*, the poem nobody else could have written.

Out of the usual very large quarterly list, I have chosen eleven volumes of original verse and two of translation which seemed to me to be (though they were not the only ones) very much worth reviewing. I will start with John Haines.[1] He grew up as the son of a naval officer and served as one in World War II, but he is not martial. He homesteaded in Alaska, and has taught both there and in Montana; and it is these places in his life that have most affected his poems. Let me quote four characteristic lines ("Winter News") to represent his meters:

They say the wells
are freezing

[1] NEWS FROM THE GLACIER, by *John Haines*. Wesleyan University Press. $15.00; 8.95.

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at Northway where
the cold begins.

Lines? Meter? I cannot make out any rationale, except that contents are sparingly dropped on the page. But that is effective in its way to express these austere poems about mountains and wild beasts, solitude in the cabin, blood on the snow. Sometimes the telling is of actualities, sometimes certainly dreamlike, not mostly good dreams. The title poem slowly builds a sense of the high country; "The Lemmings" finely suggests these perverse, suicidal little beasts. Much of the time we are left with the feeling that there is more to be told than we have quite been told, an unstated threat, a foreboding. But the best single poem I give in its completeness, though this completeness is not really typical of Haines—"The Legend of Paper Plates":

They trace their ancestry
back to the forest.
There all the family stood,
proud, bushy and strong.

Until hard times,
when from fire and drought
the patriarchs crashed.

The land was taken for taxes,
the young people cut down
and sold to the mills.

Their manhood and womanhood
was crushed, bleached
with bitter acids,
their fibres dispersed
as sawdust
among ten million offspring.

You see them at any picnic,
at ball games, at home,
and at state occasions.

They are thin and pliable,
porous and identical.
They are made to be thrown away.

This is a poem worth volumes.

The virtues of Anne S. Perlman[2] lie more in what she says than in how she says it. Her language does not have faults but, metrically and structurally, there is little that marks it as particularly hers.

[2] SORTING IT OUT, by *Anne S. Perlman*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. Distributed by University of Pittsburgh Press. $12.95; $4.95.

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Sometimes her fantasies seem to betray her, as in "The Ambulance Poem," which promises to make sense and doesn't. Yet there are some excellent pieces, such as the portrait of the Tijuana abortionist ("Back to Tijuana"):

> His close-coupled body
> is strong enough to carry
> these large-boned
> gringo women into his recovery room.
> Place them on cots
> and smile.

And

> He is a true-blue Macho Papa,
> father of twelve legitimate children
> in his off-hours.

There is a well told story of a brutal attack and beating-up in "House Dweller." And then there are five squat fishermen on the beach huddling to hide the great moray they have caught ("The Moray"):

> They link themselves
> into a round of backs,
> muscles swollen against strangers.
> Slowly they circle that knobby one
> who kills after his own death.

I fail to see why any line has to end where it does, but I like and respect these poems.

There is a good deal about death in C. G. Hanzlicek's second volume,[3] not only in the title poem. The heart of the book is a fourteen-part elegy for the poet's father, not long dead ("The One Song"). The series, which includes details of funeral, neighbors, friends, and memories, is exceedingly moving in its direct honesty. There is a short elegy for a student "killed in a tactical squad stakeout." Or we find ourselves in the Bohemian cemetery outside Owatonna, Minnesota. And there are meditations on death and the meaning of death, but the last, the title poem, is really a tribute of love to wife and friends. I particularly like "Bodie," too long to quote in full, about a ghost town, a dead town. "They just walked over the sage hills to Bridgeport." But people will not leave it alone, they come back and plunder. So too with the poet:

> My dreams, at one time,
> Seemed to hold nothing worth the taking.
> So I just walked away.

[3] CALLING THE DEAD, by *C. G. Hanzlicek*. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. Distributed by University of Pittsburgh Press. $12.95; $4.95.

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There are tourists in me, though,
Whose love of the past is merciless:
They cross the desert in air-conditioned cars;
They photograph the rubble I left behind;
They steal souvenirs
From the wind-dried houses,
Houses that want to close by falling.

Metrically, he could be Haines or Perlman. But I grow monotonous.

William Stafford has published much and pleased many, and continues, in a new volume,[4] after a manner he has made his own. I have found myself also pleased, but eluded; possibly I am on the verge of catching on. Consider these bits, from various poems: "Has the river found that island it talked / about all night to the bridge?" "Clouds in their frenzied / stillness unfolding their careful words." "I give you the sound / you can hear when the drops are talking to / themselves." "You are only a wandering dot that fails." "And I was / a mirror they heard come into place / around them." Surely all these quotes (sorry, but space makes me mangle, though I could go on and on) have something in common. "Things invisible / come true, and you can tell." Or, certainly, the inanimate becomes animate, and sometimes vice versa, and what never happened is a happening. Stafford can topple into whimsy, as in "Yellow Cars" or "If I Could Be Like Wallace Stevens." Perhaps he is seldom far from it. But sometimes he is, and, instead of "Salvaged Parts," which would have been representative, I will quote in full the atypical, and excellent, "Once in the 40s":

We were alone one night on a long
road in Montana. This was in winter, a big
night, far to the stars. We had hitched,
my wife and I, and left our ride at
a crossing to go on. Tired and cold—but
brave—we trudged along. This, we said,
was our life, watched over, allowed to go
where we wanted. We said we'd come back some time
when we got rich. We'd leave the others and find
a night like this, whatever we had to give,
and no matter how far, to be so happy again.

And now coming to Robin Fulton's new selection,[5] I find (just for instance) a poem which I will quote entire ("Home Thoughts"):

If I were to return now after
'an absence'? But while absent I have gained
too much presence. It's where I live.

[4] A GLASS FACE IN THE RAIN, by *William Stafford*. Harper & Row. $6.95.
[5] FIELDS OF FOCUS, by *Robin Fulton*. Anvil Press Poetry. £3.50.

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I add years, change houses, keep
track of myself. I post letters to the past
and answers come, always up to date.

The generations are always catching up.
The tall historic houses will still be leaning
forward like runners waiting for the starting-gun.

It's dusk—but for a pin-hole in the clouds;
a ray of sunlight glares on an empty field.
Something I can't see is being interrogated.

Am I seeing double? For presently (to revert to my barbarous gobbeting, but I know no better way) we find: "I meet a tall pine still in his prime / though his branches are not in perfect order; / he's still on duty, but perhaps past caring"; and on the opposite page: "My house / when at last I reach it looks at me / with the pallor of someone close to death." Then comes: "You open a door which I know isn't there." Then: "In light or dark, for us the clichés are real; / the hair I don't have on my spine rises, / at the window the dead faces jump into life." Finally: "Something I can't see opens, I step in." These bits are all from different poems; I isolate them to show the mode. But now I'll stop this, because Fulton is not Stafford, though the points of contact are quite extraordinary. Fulton has more of the non-happening, the little man who wasn't there, less animation of the inanimate. His landscape is mostly Scandinavian, with memories of native Scotland and the Continent; little color, many winter scenes, dark trees on snow. He is less whimsical than Stafford, and colder. Friends are mentioned, but any *you* we meet seems impersonal, as in these lines from "Outlook":

The eye is not merciful.
It reads your face like a sheet of braille
but won't rest there; it sees
always beyond your shoulder
inhuman distances.

Perhaps that tells us a good deal.

In a second volume of verse,[6] Paul Mariani has written much about himself and his family, especially his father and a brother. He comes of sturdy Italian stock which does not sound as if it had been very literate for very long, but he himself is highly literate. After Gilbert Highet, he can see the Latin poets in their landscapes, and describe Horace making his poems as Horace told us he did:

laboring
with the others on that isolated farm of his like a small bee

[6] CROSSING COCYTUS, by *Paul Mariani*. Grove Press. $12.50; $5.95.

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sipping each sweet blossom of thyme as he shaped cell
by honied cell his poems.

He interviews the ghost of Baudelaire; and as he watches the night-fishermen of Italy, and their catches, he recalls the drowned poets, Crane and Shelley, in "Following the Light," a very powerful poem. He has written some noble elegies. The best is "The Old Men Are Dying," about the funerals in the family. Two uncles are gone; their four brothers, including the poet's father, are left. It would make disproportion to quote so long a poem entire, but I must give the end:

Once

my father sat on his sister's pineslab coffin, roped
to the flat back of the horsedrawn wagon as his family
began the long procession across the 59th Street bridge,
headed for Calvary. Too young then to understand,

he smiled into the camera. But now even he must feel
the cold. You see it when the four brothers gather
at family picnics, then turn, each one alone, to watch
the ducks drifting in the stagnant pond. They stare

at the water in the last light of Long Island summer
and, though they never talk of it, brace themselves
for the time when their little boats will be cut
loose and, dressed in their best navyblue two-piece suits,

their leathery browned hands folded stiffly
right over left with the polished black beads
between them, they begin to drift out through the once
familiar channels for the last trip north.

Mariani has some poems that are tough, more that are compassionate. The drift is not always equally clear, but the lines remain firm and strong. He does not use rhyme, but he has a wonderful ear, whose effects I could illustrate again and again.

In her sixth book,[7] Mona Van Duyn writes mostly blank verse more on the order of Frost than Stevens or Aiken, but the language is a lot racier. Or it may be couplets, rhymed stanzas, even a sonnet—but whatever it is, she dishes it out with practiced casual skill. The heart of this collection is a cluster of poems from family history, about photographs, with letters and memories, with the handsome father and mother (and daughter) losing their looks and strength until "They are no longer parents. Their child is old."

[7] LETTERS FROM A FATHER AND OTHER POEMS, by *Mona Van Duyn*. Atheneum. $11.95; $6.95.

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"Lives of the Poet" describes how our poet, newly married and in her first year of college teaching, received a letter from her mother:

> I was fortunate enough to have
> a mother who on one occasion
> encouraged me by commissioning
> a poem. Newly married, I
> was tackling my first teaching job
> when a letter came which said, in part:
> "As writing is so easy for you
> I want you to write a poem about
> the San Benito Ladies Auxiliary
> that I belong to. Our club has twenty
> members and we bake cute cookies
> and serve them with coffee and do our sewing
> at the meeting. We make stuffed animals
> to give poor Texas kids at Xmas.
> Tell all that in the poem."

And so on. She says she wrote the poem. There are other themes. "A Reading of Rex Stout" plays back and forth between the unappetizing murder exhibits investigated by Nero and his minions and the lovely gourmet fare they refresh themselves with in the intervals. Mona Van Duyn is easy to take and gives you something to bite on. You may sometimes want to spit it out, as when, for instance, there is, on the lake "an immense cow-pie of mist"; but there is no lack of vigor and sharp edge. "Farm dogs explode from porches"; "deer-mice with Disney ears"; or, in a scene from liberated Madrid:

> Like bears on hind legs sharpening their claws,
> men and women stand by the walls
> and scratch with their fingernails
> at the campaign posters they disagree with,
> ripping tiny strips from the print.

A good poet to be writing, these days.

When we come to Barry Spacks,[8] we find another kind of wit, poetry of conceit and point, much rhyme, much and various form—sometimes what might almost be called metaphysical poetry, only the themes are not really metaphysical but ethical. He celebrates the brilliant misfits, the "maddening exceptions" who "win the game by changing all the rules." The poem is called "The Outrageously Blessed." His Boston poem is outrageous too, and "Mr. Berryman's Reading" is good imitation Berryman. Consider how sharp and well turned some lines are in "The Girl Not Invited":

[8] SPACKS STREET, by *Barry Spacks*. Johns Hopkins University Press. $12.00; $5.95.

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Who could
like her, want her, dustier all
the time and no damn fun and she hardly
blames them, the happy few.

Consider how intriguing is a poem which, like "Judges in Summer," begins:

Sometimes people who judge and judge
turn lovely in summer, with gin & tonics.

Spacks is easy to read, often delightful, but difficult to review because difficult to sum up. Think of his repertory of *subjects*. It includes freshmen, a crow, a cook book, his own clothes, his beard, his father-in-law's electric shaver, cats, peas, and much much more. But these subjects lead, of course, beyond themselves: they prove a point or they are accesses to the poet and those who interest him. The poems for his daughter have a special tenderness and charm, even when her ambition was to teach the penguins to fly. And that makes a good poem too.

Thom Gunn, an Englishman transplanted to California, writes,[9] apparently, with equal ease in free verse and formal verse with rhymes. Somehow, I find the most successful pieces are the free ones; effects derive from content, not meter. There is no family this time, but people, friends and (male) lovers fill the pages; and there is some strong stuff. "Sweet Things" opposes an idiot boy who wants sweets and a sharp boy who wants sex. I find it disagreeable. It's a good poem. A waitress daydreams of a vengeful order for the horrible males who order from her: "Bone hash, grease pie, and leather soup." A man thinks (again nasty wishful thinking) of throwing his hateful drunken sister headfirst over the bannisters. But "Talbot Road" is a reminiscence of a year lived in a London district, and a friend there, now dead, hardly a story even, but plainly told and the better for that. I will come back to the ending of the first poem in the book, "Elegy." A friend has gone behind the barn and shot himself in the head:

They keep leaving me
and they don't
tell me they don't
warn me that this is
the last time I'll be seeing them
as they drop away
like Danny or
slowly estrange themselves

There will be no turn of the river
where we are all reunited

[9] THE PASSAGES OF JOY, by *Thom Gunn*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.

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in a wonderful party
the picnic spread
all the lost found
as in hide and seek

An odd comfort
that the way we are always
most in agreement
is in playing the same game
where everyone always gets lost

In his second book of verse,[10] T. R. Hummer writes some autobiography, but has not laid it out in story lines that are simple and easy to follow. But I do seem to divine that he is the son of a farmer who was also a rural mail-carrier. This would have been in the south, since in one poem the carrier kills a nine-foot cottonmouth, and moccasins are not found (I believe) north of Virginia (are nine-footers found anywhere? Licensed poetic imagination?). But, as he indicates, he moved north, and some of the more powerful poems are about snow, as in this, from "Travelers' Advisory: In the Event You Are Planning Anything":

The sky is brewing
Something, all right. Whatever it is will come
Soon. The radio says by midnight, hard
Snow, deep, heavy, the kind that breaks
Tree limbs, barn roofs, power lines. Sudden snow,
The kind you can't get ready for, even if you know
To the second when it's coming, even if the radio
Tells you its name.

A good deal happened in the country, and some of it was gruesome. There is one poem so awful I have not been able to read it a second time. But sometimes the reader, this one at least, hovers in a murky no-man's-place between earthly and unearthly violence. To realize this, Hummer has gone to work in a variety of metrical forms, much of the time with those short unrhymed unshaped lines we have been encountering elsewhere. There is, however, a series of eight rather informal sonnets in which the rural carrier speaks for himself, such as "Without Guilt, the Rural Carrier Reads a Postcard":

They're fair game. Anyone who would write
Anything important on the back of one is a fool.
I saw one once that said, *Dear Mama*: *Hope you are physical,*
Also mental. Saw the reply: *I'm all right,*

[10] THE ANGELIC ORDERS, by *T. R. Hummer*. Louisiana State University Press. $5.95 p.

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Son, just the same. I lost some sleep that night
Thinking. That was years ago. Now all
I do is nod when I read them. But I read them all.
You can't make a secret of what's in plain sight.

I had an old woman on the route once who could get
Whole letters on them. Long ones. Wrote so small
I had to squint in strong sunlight to read it.
Wrote everywhere, sideways, upside-down, diagonal,
Never had much to say. But what she said
I turned sideways, upside-down, and by God read.

Yes, Hummer can be amusing, but that does not happen often. It is more in character when through a recounted series of hardships—lost ways, going half-blind with broken glasses—he moves on as a strongly sombre poet, from whom I would like to hear more.

George Starbuck has added to selections from three earlier volumes about thirty pages of new verse "from the eighties."[11] And here at last, of course, we do come to the conscious virtuoso. Since 1950 or before, Starbuck has been combining verbal pyrotechnics with a steady expression of his deep distaste for war and the makers of war. Not that there is always a grim intention. He can have a lot of pure fun, with the clerihew, like this for instance:

Mr. Paul Verlaine?
We've come to fix your Clerihew again.
No no no no, moi je m'appelle Verlaine.
Sure, buddy, and I'm Richard Henry Dana.

Or fun with "Daddy Gander's Newfound Runes" and the "Ballade of the Mislaid Worksheet," with Tagore and Agatha Christie and Benozzo Gozzoli, and with how his students spell. But "If Saturday" is about the bomb and is wholly serious; and "Communication to the City Fathers of Boston" is about the bomb in a mood of twisted humor to convey the message. This time, serious is better, and I quote the end of "If Saturday," addressed, I would gather, to two hypothetical survivors:

Row to the shore. The bomb. The bomb, the bastards.
Tell it, the two of you. Say until morning.
Say till the world retakes its age-old shapes,
lifting again the green receiving branches
eight easy minutes from the sun. The roads
will have their fill awhile of flesh in motion,
mindlessly nerved to murder as it dies.
Nations convulsing, their great thought gone static,

[11] THE ARGOT MERCHANT DISASTER, by *George Starbuck.* Little, Brown/Atlantic Monthly Press. $8.95 p.

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try your mere voices; try small work of hands.
One must begin by helping one; and you,
best-armed of pioneers, most learned savage,
granted a day's north wind, inherit all.

All the way back to the fifties. But thank God, too, for all the fun.

I end with notices of two new translations, of Virgil and Racine.[12] For Virgil's *Georgics*, Robert Wells explains his medium, and a great deal else, in an introduction which seems at times to be positively inspired. Hexameter poses a challenge. Wells has not met it with the six-beat English line so well used by Day Lewis, nor has he ironed it into iambics, though some lines lapse into that, nor again has he dumped it into prose; he has devised a five-beat line of his own. Thus, to the beekeepers, near the opening of the *Fourth Georgic*, on finding a suitable place to put their hives:

There should be water close by, pools green with moss
And a small stream running shallowly through the grass.
Let a palm or a large wild olive shade the entrance—
When the new kings lead out the swarms in early spring
To claim their season, and young bees play about the hives
The slope nearby will offer shelter from the heat
And the spread branches extend a leafy welcome.
You should bridge the water, whether a stream or a pool,
With stones or leaning willows, so that the bees
Have a surface where they can settle, spreading their wings
To the sun when a showery gust has slowed their flight
Or a sudden cloudburst drenched and beaten them down.

This translated text, although not quite up to the introduction, reads well, without dulness, mostly well made sinewy verse. Absolute fidelity is often avoided, or squeezed out, and I sometimes wonder why. Thus, in the introduction, Wells writes:

> *labor omnia vicit / improbus* (*Georgic* 1. 145), 'hard work mastered the world, wicked hard work' in a literal rendering.

Right on. Before the reign of Jupiter nobody had to work. Now all do. But this punch line is simply missing from the translated text. Still, even when particulars are hedged, or redistributed, the translation continues to satisfy and occasionally even catches something of Virgil's unearthly beauty. "To read Virgil is like looking down through very clear water," says Wells in his introduction. And this is Aristaeus, the water-nymph's son, under the river:

[12] VIRGIL: The Georgics, trans. by *Robert Wells*. Humanities Press. $12.50. JEAN RACINE'S ANDROMACHE, trans. by *Richard Wilbur*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $10.95.

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He found himself, a stranger, in his mother's house,
A place of caves, lakes, echoes, pillared groves,
Dazed by the bulk of waters, deafened by the noise.

Finally, Racine's *Andromache*, translated by Richard Wilbur, who, in an informed and lucid introduction, has explained his choice of medium. This time, it is "rhymed alexandrines into English couplets." The result is at least a striking tour de force; and when we consider that we have not only a corresponding form but remarkable fidelity of translation, it is obviously something more. Racine recast one of Euripides' dimmest plays into a formal and almost too-polished drama, which nevertheless, as I read it this time (I had forgotten just what Racine had done to the original myth) had me reading breathlessly along to see what would happen next. To any question about the efficacy of the measures taken, there's the answer. It would play.

Something should be said about these English couplets. They have been modernized. Let me quote some lines (Orestes is explaining the situation to his friend Pylades):

The talk was all of Pyrrhus; on every side
The Greeks deplored a king who in his pride,
Forgetful of his blood and fealty,
Rears at his court all Hellas' enemy,
Astyanax, Hector's young and luckless boy,
Sole remnant of the buried kings of Troy.
Andromache, they told me, had beguiled
The sly Ulysses, so as to save her child;
Another infant, torn from her embrace,
Was thought her son, and slaughtered in his place.
Pyrrhus, they said, had shunned Hermione, and
Prefers another for his crown and hand;
Old Menelaus, though doubting what he heard,
Was grieved by wedding rites so long deferred.

Resolution, which in English amounts to extra syllables in the standard five-beat ten-syllable line, is frequent, whereas in Racine's French (or Pope's English) it is forbidden; and enjambement, the run-over, is far more freely used. The language, too, is mostly twentieth-century; but in his final apostrophe to Heaven, Orestes suddenly bursts into "thee" and "thou" and "thy" and "twas" (which Wilbur defends as contemporary Massachusetts). Is this because he is addressing Heaven? It struck me wrong, as one blemish in an almost flawless piece of work.

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THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI

Heinrich Heine

When Ronald Reagan quoted Heinrich Heine in his address before the West German Bundestag last summer, the spectacle implied ironies worthy of that incomparable satirist himself. An American statesman was invoking a dedicated European who detested the United States, "where the most repulsive of all tyrants, the mob, exercises its crude rule." A Republican president was citing a constitutional monarchist who boasted: "I am, by God, no Republican, and if the Republicans prevail, they'll cut my throat because I don't admire the things they admire." It would have confirmed Heine's suspicions about Americans, Republicans, and Presidents alike to hear his words misappropriated to defend what he abhorred, such as the "cathedral of democracy" erected by the convictions of postwar Germany. "Heinrich Heine, in speaking of those who built the awe-inspiring cathedrals of medieval times, said that 'in those days people had convictions. We moderns have only opinions and it requires something more than opinions to build a Gothic cathedral.' " In fact, Heine gloated that the cathedral of Cologne, to which the President alluded, had remained unfinished during his lifetime:

> It was built to be the mind's Bastille;
> The crafty Papists plotted
> To keep German thought in this huge jail
> To languish till it rotted!

These unintended ironies were probably wasted on the politicians in Bonn who listened to Mr. Reagan on June 9. Irony presupposes knowledge, and Heine (1797–1856) is hardly a familiar figure in West Germany today. So popular in the nineteenth century that his poems—in the words of Jeffrey L. Sammons, author of the finest recent biography—were "anthologized and liedered and imitated into cliché," Heine was neglected in the twentieth century—at first because his poetry was felt to be incompatible with literary modernism and then, during the Nazi years, because he was a Jew. His books were proscribed and ultimately burned, in ominous fulfillment of a well-known line from his play *Almansor*: "Where men burn books, / They will burn people also in the end."

Polls conducted in Bavaria ten years after the war revealed that most graduates of secondary schools had never heard of Heine and many libraries owned none of his works. So West German politicians educated before 1960 are unlikely to appreciate ironies that

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depend for their understanding on familiarity with Heine's works. What they do know is that Heine, the friend of Karl Marx, has been taken up avidly in East Germany, where he is regarded as a forerunner of the ideals of modern communism. His late poem "The Slave Ship" is cited as an attack on bourgeois self-righteousness that permitted Christianity to countenance slavery. When the slaves fall ill from foul air and "melancholia," the supercargo forces them to dance on the decks while he folds his hands in prayer:

> "Oh, spare their lives for Jesus' sake
> Who did not die in vain!
> For if I don't keep three hundred head
> My business is down the drain."

And "Germany: A Winter's Tale," is interpreted on the other side of the Wall as propaganda against the Federal Republic. This mock epic recapitulates in twenty-seven chapters the trip through Germany that Heine made in 1843. Every town, from Aachen to Hamburg, elicits satirical comment (e.g., the strophe on the Cologne cathedral). The poem ends with a grand apocalypse when the goddess of Hamburg, whom the poet first takes for a streetwalker, exposes Germany's future to him in her enchanted chamber pot:

> The things I saw there I can't reveal—
> My oath makes it unlawful;
> But I can tell you this much now:
> My God, the smell was awful!—

In sum, Ronald Reagan's evocation of Heine, remembered today in Bonn mainly as an anti-bourgeois troublemaker, was calculated to provoke the same kind of response that Helmut Schmidt might elicit if he appeared before Congress to edify the members with a lecture based on the thoughts of Max Eastman or John Reed.

Now why, if we discount simple incompetence or perverseness, would White House speech-writers provide the President with quotations likely to produce consternation at best and indignation at worst? Despite his controversial reputation in Germany, Heine has long enjoyed an international vogue unmatched by any other German writer except Goethe. His poems have been set to music more frequently than any in world literature since the Psalms. Among his foreign admirers, none have been more fervent—despite Heine's contempt—than the English and the Americans. The earliest reception was mixed, to be sure, as a result of the late romantic hostility toward his irrepressible wit. Carlyle called him a "blackguard" and a "slimy and greasy Jew." But contempt soon gave way to admiration for the poet in whom George Eliot saw a lyric genius second only to Goethe and, indeed, superior to him in prose. Matthew Arnold her-

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alded him as a brother-in-arms against Philistinism, a term that he gratefully appropriated from Heine. By 1870 Heine had entered the Anglo-American cultural stream as the German counterpart to Voltaire and Byron, the great neo-paganist and foe of soft-minded Nazarenes. When Germany became the enemy in two world wars, Heine was exempted from the general condemnation on the grounds that he was a citizen of the world, and during the twenties and thirties no fewer than nine biographies appeared in English.

Heine also attracted dozens of translators, who have tested their skills on his cunning rhymes and deceptively simple rhythms. In addition to such notable achievements as Louis Untermeyer's splendid translation of 325 poems by Heine, there have been three previous "complete" editions of his poetry—all insufficient by any standards of poetic fidelity and scholarly adequacy. Therefore Hal Draper's new translation is a welcome and impressive accomplishment.[1] A labor—one is tempted to say, an obsession—of thirty years, his translation is complete and reliable according to the best German editions, including, in addition to the poems both collected and uncollected, the verse-dramas *Almansor* and *William Ratcliff* as well as Heine's two great mock epics. The Appendices provide 150 pages of "Notes and Variants" consistent with the latest scholarly sources, which provide the background information necessary for the appreciation of the individual poems.

Hal Draper has given us a "modern" Heine that catches Heine's characteristic tone while preserving—"fetishistically," as he confesses—Heine's rhyming and metrical patterns. While not every line in more than 800 pages is perfect—S. S. Prawer in a meticulous *TLS* review (July 9, 1982) has pointed out some slips as well as certain Americanisms in the language—I think that Draper succeeds remarkably well. When the text calls for a clever rhyme, he usually comes up with one:

> We'd all talk in a Roman tongue,
> And dress in a Roman tunic,
> See Swabians called *quirites* and
> Vestal virgins even in Munich.

When Heine employs a virtuoso twist, as in "Der Apollogott," which uses the same rhyme sixteen times in eight strophes, Draper imitates the effect with ingenuity. But the impact lies mainly in the whole, not in the details. Ultimately Heine's achievement emerges from the totality of his oeuvre, not from individual pieces alone, just as his attitudes become evident only in the aggregate and not in individual passages, which can be culled selectively to make almost any point.

[1] THE COMPLETE POEMS OF HEINRICH HEINE: A Modern English Version, by *Hal Draper*. Suhrkamp/Insel. $29.95.

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Heine once wrote to his publisher Campe that his reputation as a poet would rest on "three pillars." The pillar of his first period—indeed, the main pillar of his fame altogether—is the *Book of Songs* of 1827, possibly the most famous volume of German poetry, a collection whose poems have been set to music almost 3000 times. The core of the book consists of the sections "Lyrical Intermezzo" and "The Homecoming," which in their treatment of unrequited love constitute what one critic has called the "greatest set of variations in German verse" since the Middle Ages. Readers long assumed that the poems amounted to a closely autobiographical account of Heine's hapless love affairs with his cousins Amalie and Therese, daughters of his millionaire uncle Salomon Heine in Hamburg. Recent biographical studies as well as a more sophisticated appreciation of Heine's poetic genius have taught us that the poems actually constitute a great fiction, involving a parody of romantic clichés, in which Heine paraded one of the various personae that he was constantly constructing in an effort—like his Russian contemporary Gogol—to conceal his true self and feelings from the public. Hence that famous *Stimmbrechung,* the sudden shift of mood that typifies the last lines of these brief poems:

> Upon my sweetheart's pretty eyes
> I make the finest canzoni;
> Upon my sweetheart's lips, likewise,
> I make the best terzinas;
> Upon my sweetheart's cheeks I devise
> The grandest ottave rime.
> And had my sweet a heart, upon it
> I'd make the most resplendent sonnet.

More typical than the ottava rima, whose romantic popularity is parodied here, is the four-line ballad stanza with its syncopated four-beat line:

> On wings of song, my darling,
> I'll carry you off, and we'll go
> Where the plains of the Ganges are calling,
> To the sweetest place I know.

It is no accident that the best-known settings of Heine's poems—e.g. Schumann's *Dichterliebe*—are based on these sections.

The two most familiar sections are framed by "Youthful Sorrows," which contains several of Heine's finest ballads ("The Grenadiers," "Belshazzar") and by Heine's only experiment with free verse, the remarkable "North Sea" cycle. These powerful poems, while satirizing the titanic stance of the romantic lover, foreshadow Heine's growing interest in neo-Hellenic paganism. In "Declara-

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tion," for instance, the love-sick poet watches in dismay as the cruel waves wash away the name of his beloved, which he has written on the sand:

> You fragile reed, you crumbling sand,
> You fugitive waves, I trust you no more!
> The heavens grow darker, my heart grows wilder,
> And with mighty hand, from Norway's forests
> I wrench the tallest fir tree
> And dip it deep
> Into Etna's burning maw, and with this
> Fiery-tipped pen of giants
> I write on the darkling dome of heaven,
> "Agnes, I love you!"

In 1831, depressed by his failures in Germany—as a businessman, as a lawyer, as an editor—and attracted by the excitement of the July Revolution, Heine moved to Paris to report on French life, politics, and culture for German newspapers. Heine's most memorable writing during the next fifteen years was his prose, in which he created a flexible literary tool that raised journalism to a high literary art. The poems of these years—collected in the *New Poems* of 1844—constitute, in contrast, the weakest of his collections, displaying neither the thematic unity of the early *Book of Songs* nor any movement in new directions. The forty-four poems of the section "New Spring"—Heine liked to group his poems in multiples of eleven—amount to a reprise of the old theme of unrequited love; and the characters portrayed in "Sundry Women" are poetic personae with no more mimetic reality than the girls in the earlier collections. While Heine's shift of emphasis from the first person of the early love poems to politics and public affairs is anticipated in some of the ballads and romances, the finest work of these years is represented by the two mock epics, "Germany: A Winter's Tale" and its counterpart—also in twenty-seven "caputs" and with a Shakespearean subtitle—"Atta Troll: A Summer Night's Dream." This animal fable, which occupies a distinguished place in the genre extending from Aesop to Orwell, uses the tale of a dancing bear who escapes from his trainer and is hunted down and killed in the Pyrenees as a pretext to attack all of Heine's pet antipathies. At the same time the narrative, written in the trochaic tetrameter to which Heine was addicted, parodies the conventions of the romantic epic:

> How the poets rave on—even
> Those who are housebroken—singing,
> Chanting dithyrambs to Nature,
> Calling it God's mighty temple. . . .

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In 1848, Heine was struck down by a spinal paralysis of syphilitic origin and confined for the last eight years of his life to what he called his "mattress grave." The dark poems of these years, many of which were collected in the last of his "three pillars," the volume *Romanzero* (1851), show us Heine in a new mode—no longer the lighthearted parodist of the early years but, in S. S. Prawer's phrase, the "tragic satirist." In politics and social affairs generally he had become convinced that the power of evil—in a sense that often seems to anticipate Hannah Arendt's banality—is inevitably victorious over good.

> Why do just men stagger, bleeding,
> Crushed beneath their cross's weight,
> While the wicked ride the high horse,
> Happy victors blest by fate?

While the young Heine had not been much preoccupied by religion, the aging poet in his mattress-grave was obsessed—"regressively," as he observed—with the nature of a God that he saw as unpredictable and vindictive. His religious skepticism is summed up by the bitter last word in the final poem of the volume ("Disputation"), which records a debate between a rabbi and a monk in medieval Toledo. After twelve hours of wearying theology the king asks his queen which of the two seems to have won:

> "I don't know which one is right—
> But I'll tell you what I think
> Of the rabbi and the friar;
> Both of them alike, they stink."

Heine's uncollected late poems include, besides a number of sardonic animal fables, the moving confessional fragment "Bimini," which uses the legend of Ponce de Leon and his quest for the Fountain of Youth to thematize the dying poet's anguish in the face of death. The great political poem "The Roving Rats" must give pause to any modern interpreter tempted to take Heine's attacks on the bourgeoisie as an indication of sympathy for communism:

> There are two kinds of rat:
> One hungry, and one fat.
> The fat ones stay content at home,
> But the hungry ones go out and roam.
>
> This radical rodent squad
> Is ignorant of God
> Their whelps unbaptized as can be,
> The wives are common property.

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These roving rats, alas!
Are near us now en masse.
I hear their squeaks—straight on they press—
Their multitude is numberless.

Unlike Baudelaire or Matthew Arnold, or even his German contemporaries Mörike and Platen, Heine did not appreciably further poetry as an art. His sole venture beyond traditional romantic forms is restricted to the early "North Sea" poems. But in spirit Heine is closer to us—for better and for worse—than most of his contemporaries. The traditional modes he preferred accommodate a voice that can shrill up from the wistful zaniness of a Woody Allen to the mordant wrath of a Mort Sahl. In his brilliance Heine formulated everything better than anyone else—that's why it is so tempting to quote him. But he never permitted mere facts or consistency to get in the way of a good punch line—and that's why it's so hazardous to quote him. We identify with Heine in his peeves and antipathies much more easily than in his beliefs. After all, he is the man who said that the appropriate corollary for the Latin tag *de mortuis nil nisi bene* would be: "Of the living speak nothing but ill." Heine's social criticism—whether directed against bourgeois hypocrisy or romantic sentimentality or mindless radicalism—is marvelously appropriate today. Heine's rootlessness—it is no accident that his earliest prose volumes are entitled "Travel Pictures" and that he spent most of his life in exile—anticipates the condition of modern urban man, whose plight he was among the first to analyze and understand. Thanks to Hal Draper, this modern Heine in his ambivalent entirety is now available to us in accents as familiar as the jittery rhythms of an urban *semblable,* a modern *frère*, mocking himself and his illusions as readily as he ridicules the rest of the world for its foibles.

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Chronicles

VERNON YOUNG

Film Chronicle: Dying Is Easy . . .

SOMEONE DID BUILD AN OPERA HOUSE on the Amazon river. For inscrutable reasons, his personality did not suit Werner Herzog's purpose when he conceived the film, *Fitzcarraldo*. That I am not sure what his purpose was I shall not apologize for; Herzog, himself, faltered in his pursuit of it. He invented (I believe) another opera-stricken character, an Irishman who called himself Fitzcarraldo, determined to build *his* monument in an even more inaccessible stretch of the Amazon: at Iquitos in Peru, bloody miles west of Manaos (the last deep-water port), an outpost no one except an armed overseer of the rubber monopoly would have had any reason to visit. A man so dedicated would have had to be mad, and in the early sequences Klaus Kinski (who puts me in mind of Barabbas, no matter who he's being) plays Fitzcarraldo as an obsessed loony, undeterred by the obstacles (mainly economic) that impede his ambition, and given to hysterical proclamations, in salons and from church belfries, maudlin testimonials to the art of Bellini or Verdi, and to petulant aspersions on the opulent habits of Don Aquilino, a capitalist whose largesse he badly needs. Yet when he engineers the boat operation which seems to have been the principal reason for contriving this movie, he is merely fanatical in his concentration and, as it develops, a masterful tactician and navigator. At a knock-down price, he buys an excursion boat (abandoned by Don Aquilino), refits it and persuades a few hundred head-hunting Jivaro Indians to drag the damn thing over a jungle mountain-top from one river to another. Why? So that he can make a killing in the rubber boom and eventually build the opera house of his dreams.

Implied by the script, and perhaps assisted by Kinski's previous *persona* on the Amazon (*Aguirre*), this wild-eyed Irishman should be a man with his doom upon him. The film's overture is in that key: a dreary expanse of the great river under sultry light, complemented by a text about God leaving the jungle unfinished until the last man has become extinct. But this is gratuitous rhetoric. Fitzcarraldo's Folly is transformed into a victory with the material help of funds from an old friend who has made a fortune running a brothel. It couldn't have taken a long second thought for Herzog to settle lazily for that solution and I'm not surprised that Claudia Cardinale performs the benefactress in a state of anemic bewilderment.

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Whenever Herzog is provided with unlimited space and a liberal budget he obeys any theatrical or doctrinal hunch that offers itself, and drops it just as arbitrarily. Of this kind is Fitzcarraldo's wind-up phonograph bellowing Verdi into the jungle, an inspiration effectually vitiated because Herzog uses it three times instead of once at the single decisive moment. Did the Indians harrowing them on the river resolve on peaceful negotiation upon hearing the voice of the White Man's God or because a "white boat" had been prophesied as their nemesis? Herzog couldn't decide and therewith flubbed a chance to rival the Valkyrie assault in *Apocalypse Now*. His authentic Indians, by the way, hired to impersonate the head-hunting Jivaros, are moon-faced to a man; a pity that he couldn't have induced an Jivaro or two to occupy the foreground; they are not only more expressive, they are perhaps the handsomest of American Indian tribes. *Nothing* really works in this film except the boat-hauling. This could have been awesome stuff if the sequel had been a trenchant comment on human strivings. In my uncompromising opinion, the film should have ended when, safely launched on its second river, the boat fatally drifts into the tributary rapids of the Pongo; there (in my version), trapped within canyon walls, it would thrash from one side of its cage to the other like a whimpering animal, unable ever to free itself![1] . . . Why the *captain* was not at the helm in this hour of near disaster is a strategic detail disdained by Herzog as he rescues Fitzcarraldo for a future in which, incidentally, the extermination of Indians will be a necessary consequence of his cigar-smoking pact with Don Aquilino!

On his deathbed, the celebrated actor, Edmund Kean, is supposed to have assured his sympathizers that dying was easy; *comedy* was the harder act to do convincingly! On that basis I might absolve Herzog for not having sentenced Fitzcarraldo to a fate at least as grandiose as that of Aguirre's, in his Amazonia I. But I'll concede, with too many recent films in mind, that comedy as a conception, in its purer forms, is harder to achieve than the Absurdist mode which is currently the universal substitute for tragedy. Fifteen years ago I would have said (I feel certain I must have!) that Italian film comedy at every level was the best in the world. Since the mid-sixties, with an insufficient number of exceptions for reassurance, the Italian movie, of any category, has reflected the catastrophic indecisions and political adventurism of Italian society. A characteristic example, the more shocking because there is no measure of temporization in its argument, is Marco Bellocchio's *Leap Into The Void*. If this film had been made in the sixties, when Antonioni was viewing with concern, and with more compassion than rancor, the limbo of

[1] Peter Matthiessen, listed among the advisors on this film, made the descent of the Pongo rapids in a *canoa*, against advice and in the event unwillingly, if courageously. His narrative of the dread occasion is in his 1961 book on South America, *The Cloud Forest* (Viking).

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a professional class with no stake in its society, it might have seemed an original, if abrasive, contribution to the subject of cultural unease and political frustration which was newly emerging to replace the neo-realism of the immediate postwar years. Today, *Leap Into The Void* is simply one more Italian film, of which there have been a hundred, in which unrelenting ridicule is the weapon, hate is the solvent and nihilism is the conspicuous answer. It could be said that Bellocchio made this film before, as *Fist In the Pocket*, a brilliant and saturnine history of a derailed family, the members of which liquidate one another with unfailing resources and in operatic style. No sociological inferences could have been safely drawn from that altogether Gothic melodrama. The family therein was not a microcosm of Italian society. The family in *Leap Into The Void* patently is!

Several commentators have described this film as a comedy. I assume that they did not so much find it funny as sardonic. With impressive economy, that's for sure, Bellocchio has depicted a sick, internecine and impotent family circle, mainly represented by Marta, an unmarried virgin on the cusp of schizophrenia (Anouk Aimee) and her authoritarian but epicene brother, Judge Ponticelli (Michel Piccoli). When not triple-locking himself into his house and into his room (where he tepidly fantasizes sexual relations with his sister), the judge is enticed by self-destructive appeals to the Tiber hangout of a Bohemian terrorist of sorts, Sciabola—one of the kind described memorably by Leopold Ranke as displaying "all the aspects of genius except the talent." At the climax of this vindictive fable, Sciabola, believing himself to be hounded by ruling conspirators, invades the judge's house with fellow hoodlums, destroys everything he can lay hands on which is destructible and urinates on his spoil in frontal medium closeup for Bellocchio's camera. (For persistent tastelessness, Italian films are difficult to surpass.) In the denouement, Judge Ponticelli recapitulates an earlier victim of Sciabola's tyranny by suddenly and quietly murmuring to himself, "I can do what I like in my own house," then leaping into the void from his balcony. His sister, affected by a presentiment that she is alone in the world, wakes up and leaves her own bed for that of her housekeeper's small boy. Under which species of comedy might these spasms of despair, fright and contempt be classified? If the movies of a country, *by and large*, authenticate the prevailing temper, the masochistic predicament of Italians revealed by this depressing film should move all but the most indifferent onlooker to tears!

Civilized comedy survives, I am relieved to note, not only in France but in England, from whence comes the film of the year, *Brimstone and Treacle*, a "Christian" comedy. Its subject, in the mere telling, is almost as nasty as that of *Leap Into The Void*, but I trust you will get the point if I insist that it is *infernally* nasty!—and that it fulfills the irreducible condition of comedy, restoring the balance which has been initially upset. Since many filmgoers otherwise on

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their toes appreciated *Picnic at Hanging Rock* for inadequate reasons, or did *not* appreciate it because they missed the clues and were hence unnecessarily impatient with what they believed to be gratuitous mystification, I shall run the risk here of overexplaining. *Brimstone and Treacle* declares its intention at the outset, beginning with the title, which an American may need to translate as Sulphur and Molasses; either way it denotes *a harsh remedy*. When the film is over and all but assimilated, it's a pleasure to re-sit the opening footage and observe the seamless dexterity with which the subject is set up in both its dimensions.

As if on calling cards, the separate credits are ejected from an aperture unidentifiable until the camera draws back and you find that you have been staring at the mouth of a gargoyle into which a solitary leaf is now swept, before the view is enlarged and the camera sails down to the cathedral front. From the interior emerges a mob of cheerful choristers: among them, incongruously, our leading miscreant, dressed—how should I say?—in the nondescript fashion of youth anywhere (he is played by "Sting," a rock musician). Disgruntled, as if he had just taken a beating, he becomes visibly wretched when the church bells bang out, covering his ears with his hands. Next he chews hastily on what looks like (and should be, apropos of the demonology) a turnip, before initiating his customary gambit, accosting a perfect stranger with the enthusiastic outburst, "*Well,* fancy meeting *you* here! It's been ages! Still living in the same place?" or words to that effect. But the chap he first tries this on refuses to be his straight man, retorting, "Who the devil are *you?*"—which puts the whole movie within your grasp. And a moment later—lovely touch—he declares scornfully, "Why, I wouldn't know you from Adam!"

With that for sole satisfaction, Martin (as he later calls himself) seeks another victim and finds him in the affable person of Tom, an independent publisher (in a small way) of greeting-cards, for which he writes poems himself (in a small way). Tom is affable. Tom is momentarily disarmed; he is warmly prepared to betray his name, his affiliations and his domestic anxieties. The leaf is in the gargoyle's mouth. From here on, as he insinuates himself into the invincibly middle-class household of Tom and Norma, the better to practice lechery on their bedridden, unconscious daughter Patricia, arch reminders of Martin as emissary succeed one another at discreet intervals. When Norma, to the intruder's horror, asks him to *pray* with her for Patricia's recovery, Martin plunges rapidly into the formula from *Macbeth,* "When shall we three meet again?"—*de*-exorcizing himself, so to speak: upon which the heavens open in a great downpour while he slides on to the required solemnities of the Protestant faith.

Nothing better distinguishes the scenario of Dennis Potter and the direction of Richard Loncraine than their forbearing refusal to

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overexploit the manifest complacency which the life of Tom and Norma suggests. If his daughter had not been struck down in a car accident, Tom, you feel, would not be resisting Martin's phony teleology with stout disbelief; his sentiments would resemble the pieties of his greeting-card poems! While he is proof against Martin's less plausible ingratiations, his unconscious is fallible; much to his consternation he is visited by salacious and grotesque dreams. As for Norma, she's an authentic echo of Candide. "When you step into the garden and look up at the stars, you realize that this little box we live in is not all there is." Indefensible by reason, this bromide is, in a larger sense, what Martin's visit is all about. While we are not on his side, we tend to regard his prey with condescension (mitigated by the disingenuous perfection of Denholm Elliot and Joan Plowright, who act Tom and Norma with never a false breath). In actuality, they would no end bore us; in the scheme of things, we begin uncomfortably to recognize, they assert an equal right to exist.

I don't want to alarm the reader by suggesting that the film is so securely on the side of the angels that he'd rather take to the woods. *Tone* is everything here, as it must be in educative comedy. Loncraine's directorial touch is deft and always on the mark; he never *protracts* a point, never hangs you up, never nudges you with cross-cut reaction takes. The ironies are volatile; the comic prevails. And if the True Believer is tempted to crow at the outcome, as hilarious as it is moral, let him consider that in a very real sense Patricia *is* restored to the living by an act of concupiscence! . . . Enough. See the film. Believe me, it's funny. And believe me, it's a work of art.

Postscript. Upon seeing *Brimstone and Treacle* yet again, I note that I was overzealous towards a detail. In that opening sequence, Martin is unmistakably chewing a *carrot*! And, if it's worth the quibble, what the accosted stranger actually says is, "Why the devil don't you look where you're going?"

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ROBERT ASAHINA

Theatre Chronicle

"WATCH OUT FOR OUR EXPENSIVE GARBAGE!" I overheard that surprising command just before the opening number of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats*. The injunction came not, as I momentarily thought, from someone with a proper sense of the relationship between art and commerce on Broadway, but from an usher steering some front-row late-comers around the Winter Garden stage, which John Napier has extended into the space once reserved for the orchestra pit. Heaped along the periphery of the stage, and extending up ramps to festoon the front of the mezzanine, are piles of "expensive garbage"—empty soda cans, moldy bottles, twisted silverware, unstrung tennis rackets, chunks of tires, crushed cigarette packs, all three or four times larger than life, though appropriately scaled to man-sized cats.

I never thought I'd feel comfortable in a junk-yard, but Napier's set design invites the audience to feel almost as much at home as the performers. (Indeed, during the intermission, many people left their seats to wander around the stage—with no further warnings from nervous ushers.) The effect is not unlike that of the set Napier fashioned for *Nicholas Nickleby*, which like *Cats* was directed by Trevor Nunn. But the resemblance between the two productions ends there. *Nicholas Nickleby* was in the best tradition of English ensemble acting—literate, understated, intelligent. *Cats*, though originally produced in London, has been so Americanized that it is now a grotesque example of the worst kind of Broadway musical spectacular—vulgar, loud, crude.

It scarcely matters that the "book" of *Cats* is T. S. Eliot's whimsical *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. In Webber's hands, the play's not the (original) thing; *Cats* has about the same relation to its source as his *Jesus Christ Superstar* had to the New Testament. The poems are *there*, all right—spoken, hissed, and sung by twenty-six men and women in feline drag. But the words are, for the most part, inaudible and irrelevant; the accompanying music is more to the point, since it also accompanies the dancing, which is the real point of *Cats*.

Gillian Lynne's choreography (heavily reworked between London and New York) is about as vigorously athletic and "showy" as anything you can see on Broadway. And about as pointless. Without a dramatic context, without a story, all that prowling and prancing, all those leaps and landings, become rather tiresome to behold (and execute, I would imagine). The first ensemble number, "Jellicle

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Songs for Jellicle Cats," pretty much announces all the choreographic possibilities of the show.

Worse still, Lynne's eclectic notion of what cats do (or would do if they were bipedal animals in furry suits) includes a lot of things *dogs* do. To a Charleston-like beat, Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer, the "knockabout clowns, quick-change comedians," do a stiff-legged kick that is charmingly canine, not gracefully feline. Likewise, throughout the play, Lynne puts the dancers in a Bob Fosse-like pose—on both hands and one knee, with the free leg extended to the side, parallel to the floor—that looks suspiciously like a dog cozying up to a fire hydrant.

And despite their undeniable ability, most of the performers are amazingly uncatlike—too much Gene Kelly and not enough Fred Astaire. (One marvelous exception is a female member of the "Cats Chorus," impossible to identify from the program, whose body ripples under her bronze Spandex costume with a feral suppleness that makes it quite clear why "feline" is part of the sexual vocabulary of human beings.) Minus their fuzzy headdresses and ears, these creatures, de-clawed, could be hoofers in *Dreamgirls*.

As for those costumes, why is the fur limited to the head, wrists, and ankles of most of the performers? The only fully-furred felines in the cast seem to be singled out for reverence (Old Deuteronomy, "who has lived many lives in succession"), humor (Bustopher Jones, "The Cat About Town"), or pity (Gus, "The Theatre Cat" who "isn't the Cat that he was in his prime," and Grizabella). And Grizabella doesn't really belong in this show, anyway. Her book is not *Old Possum's* but the young Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," which Webber has vulgarized into a mournful "show-stopper" called "Memory" ("Mammary" in the wispy, lispy voice of Betty Buckley), a truly hideous yowl full of unearned cornball pathos ("I remember I was beautiful then . . . ").

Other would-be "show-stoppers" include the penultimate number, which features Grizabella's ascension to the heavens on a platform resembling the Mother Ship in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. (More evidence, if needed, of how theater, unlike film, is better off trying to engage our imagination than to dazzle us with engineering: who could possibly miss that giant lever arm—not in the least obscured by clouds of fake fog—lifting the platform toward the ceiling?)

With effects like that, more costly than special, it is easy to see where the reported $5–7 million in capitalization went. The guiding principle of *Cats* seems to be "if it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing." If Mr. Mistoffelees looks good in a Darth Vader-like helmet with flashing electric eyes, why not outfit a whole army of feline "Chinks" with similar headgear in the mock-opera "Growltiger's Last Stand"? (Another self-canceling special effect: as I watched, I

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could only wonder where the batteries were concealed. Inside the masks? Somewhere on the dancers' bodies?)

But it is hard to see what theatre-goers are getting for their $40 tickets. (Or what critics got for their complimentary seats.) The tunes cannot be remembered, much less whistled. The few moments of humor derive from weak parodies of the real thing, like Growltiger's opera, or from imitations of other acts in other shows. Terrence V. Mann's Rum Tum Tugger, for example, simply apes—if you will forgive the term—Tim Curry's Dr. Frank N. Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show.* And the flashing strobe lights, the blaring music (played by an orchestra hidden behind the trash at the rear of the stage and led by a conductor who is also concealed, though his face and baton can be seen on two video monitors hanging from the loge and facing the stage), and the overall frenetic and unceasing striving for socko effect are oppressive and . . . somehow sad. Show dancing is one of the few distinctive contributions of the American stage to the world theatrical tradition, and it is disheartening to see it reduced—by an English writer, director, and choreographer, no less—to the level of garish spectacle, full of sound and fury, but . . .

I was likewise discouraged by Lanford Wilson's *Angels Fall*—doubly so since I have admired his work as I never have Webber's. Wilson also represents a distinctly American tradition—of down-home naturalism, firmly rooted in stubborn particularity while rising (or at least commendably aspiring) to compelling universality. And his best plays—*Fifth of July,* for example—deftly balance the competing claims of several shrewdly sketched characters whose lives mesh in a complex and revealing drama.

The drama in *Angels Fall,* however, is merely blatant contrivance. As many reviewers have noted, this is a "lifeboat" play in which the characters are thrown together by more or less arbitrary circumstances, beyond their control, which force them to question themselves and one another. As the play begins, five travelers—Niles Harris (Fritz Weaver) and his young wife, Vita (Nancy Snyder), Marion Clay (Tanya Berezin) and her young companion, Salvatore "Zappy" Zappala (Brian Tarantina), and Don Tabaha (Danton Stone)—find themselves stranded in a mission run by Father William Doherty (Barnard Hughes). The local roads have been closed, traffic has come to a standstill, and no explanation is offered by the authorities.

The play proceeds along the familiar lines of recriminations prompting revelations and further recriminations prompting further revelations. Niles, we learn, is a disillusioned art history professor whose psychological problems—which he delicately calls "a disturbance in my willful suspension of disbelief"—have led the board of his college to send him to a posh funny farm in the Southwest. Vita, once his student, is now acting as his nursemaid, which Niles

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resents. Marion turns out to be the recent widow of a painter Niles once scornfully dismissed as a regional artist, while Zappy, a John McEnroe-like tennis pro whose tour she is sponsoring, turns out to be her lover. Don, at first seeming little more than a sullen Indian, is actually a doctor on the nearby Navajo reservation: he regards as patronizing the attention paid him by Father Doherty, who it so happens has known him all his life.

What drama there is results from a few not too surprising twists in some of these characterizations. Don is revealed to be not a run-of-the-mill M.D. but a brilliant researcher with a chance to leave the reservation for a university job, much to Father Doherty's distress. Zappy is not a gigolo; he truly loves Marion, who is not the ditsy broad she appears to be, but a successful gallery owner dedicated to her late husband's memory.

Unfortunately, the two main characters, Father Doherty and Niles, remain mostly the same from beginning to end. (Vita remains little more than her husband's passive adjunct throughout.) The priest is avuncular and philosophical, a shrewd but kindly man of the same cloth as Barry Fitzgerald; the professor is arrogant and neurotic, a rationalist "victimized by a sense of irony" and tortured by doubts about his scholarship and his teaching. ("I reread my three books," he says, "and realized I didn't believe a word of them." And his students "don't even know they're being brainwashed. They don't even care.") Religion versus reason, faith versus skepticism—the schema is simply too predictable.

We are hardly surprised when Father Doherty says of the accident—nuclear: how is that for fate?—that has brought the characters together: "The only benefit of these little accidents, these rehearsals for the apocalypse, is that they force us to get our act together." Which means asking ourselves, the priest continues, "What manner of persons ought we to be?"

True to the conventions of the lifeboat genre, an insight into that existential problem is forthcoming from the idiot savant on board, Zappy, whose epiphany occurred at age ten, when he discovered he was a natural at tennis. As he puts it, "That's magic, when you know what you're supposed to be." Then Don, who had first stubbornly resisted Father Doherty's career advice (while reiterating the immortal words of James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause:* "You're tearing me apart"), comes to realize that leaving the reservation behind might entail leaving himself behind. And Niles eventually takes to heart Father Doherty's observation that "teachers and preachers have responsibilities."

At the end of *Angels Fall,* the nuclear accident turns out to be of less than apocalyptic dimensions; the roads are reopened, and the five travelers are free to leave, fallen angels who have presumably found some measure of redemption. It would be nice to think that they could so easily come to terms with their uncertainties, that all it

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took was a few therapeutic hours of forced intimacy with strangers in the shadow of possible doom. But that kind of sentimental pseudopsychodrama belongs in made-for-TV movies, where everything works out okay in the last fifteen minutes, not in a serious stage play by a serious playwright.

At least the talented members of the Circle Repertory get a chance to show their stuff. Dennis Parichy's lighting gives an eerie (radioactive?) warm glow to John Lee Beatty's realistically sparse set. And Marshall Mason, Wilson's longtime collaborator, has directed the ensemble with a sure and even hand. Only the two "stars," Hughes and Weaver, chafe at the bit, with the former a mite too elfish and the latter a shade too self-dramatizing (even for the character he plays). The others, all regulars with the Circle Repertory, deliver subtle, controlled performances. Berezin reveals the unexpected warmth beneath the brassy exterior of her character, just as Tarantina shows the maturity beneath the adolescent façade of his. Stone, who was so funny as the zonked-out guitarist in *Fifth of July,* is not afraid to make Don unlikable at times; if the character's surliness occasionally seems unmotivated, the fault is in the writing, not the acting.

Snyder's acting in a similarly underwritten role likewise shows how much difference the player can make to the play. To get a sense of her abilities, compare her performance as the flakey heiress in the original Circle Repertory production of *Fifth of July* to Swoosie Kurtz's in the Broadway version. Kurtz won acclaim and awards for her flamboyant excess, but her interpretation upset the balance of what was supposed to be an eight-character play, not a one-woman showcase. Snyder, by contrast, was very much a member of the ensemble, never giving in to the temptation to make more of her part than Wilson intended. In *Angels Fall* her problem is exactly the opposite: to give some weight to an undernourished character. She manages this by employing the most delicate of gestures to suggest a lifetime of deferential care—a hesitant pluck at some invisible lint on Niles's clothes or a half-checked flinch at his dismissal of her concern.

Near the end of *Angels Fall,* Father Doherty complains, "I-40 used to be Route 66. I think they do that deliberately so we won't get attached to anything." Such a complaint about the changing face of the American landscape could have been made by a character in a play by Sam Shepard. Indeed, similar sentiments are voiced in Shepard's *True West,* which pictures two brothers locked in a death struggle that ultimately turns on precisely the question of what the True West is. At one point, Lee, the older brother, observes, "This country's real different." Austin, the younger, replies, "Well, it's been built up." To which Lee retorts, "Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don't hardly recognize it."

That exchange might make *True West* seem like a clichéd exami-

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nation of the cheapening of the American Dream, but it is Shepard's genius as a playwright to uncover the myths that animate (and degenerate into) such clichés, to transform the hackneyed images of popular culture and the stale metaphors of vernacular American English into startling poetic images, verbal and visual. Like Wilson, Shepard is solidly grounded in the familiar, the mundane. But unlike Wilson, he self-consciously uses naturalism not as a "transparent" mode of dramatizing through characterization, but as a theatrical device, a formal mode manipulated to yield those surprising images. Thus he avoids the sentimental traps that Wilson succumbs to in *Angels Fall;* Shepard's plays are never really "about" their characters or their problems.

Which is not to say the characters are not vividly drawn. Whatever the weaknesses of the play, Austin and Lee are truly memorable creations. The younger brother, a local boy who made good at an Eastern college and then sold out to Hollywood, is temporarily holed up in his mother's house in the desert, east of Los Angeles, while working on a script and trying to sell it to a Hollywood producer named Saul Kimmer. The older brother is a desert rat, a scrounger and petty thief who has wandered back to civilization after spending three months in the Mojave.

Frightened of his brother, scared to lend him his car (though wishing to get him out of his hair) yet afraid not to (when threatened), anxious about his dealings with Kimmer but concerned with justifying his work to Lee and himself, Austin is a classic worm just waiting to turn. "I wish I didn't have to be doing business down here," he apologizes to Lee, while nervously entrusting his car keys to him. "I'd like to just spend some time with you." "I thought it was 'Art' you were doin'," replies Lee with a twist of the knife.

But sibling rivalry is just the tool Shepard uses to pry open the can of worms that is the American Dream. As *True West* progresses, each brother gains, loses, then regains the upper hand in a series of confrontations fraught with an aggression that springs less from their individual psychologies than from their cultural archetypes. Lee undermines Austin's agreement with Kimmer and even goes so far as to make his own deal to write a "true-to-life Western." But once he sits down in his brother's place, Lee can barely operate Austin's typewriter and can only contrive the most trite plot and characters imaginable ("two lamebrains chasing each other across Texas," in Austin's words), creations drawn not from his imagination or his experiences in the desert but from countless grade B Westerns. When Lee admits he needs his brother's help and agrees to cut him in on the deal, Austin taunts him: "Well, maybe I oughta' go out and try my hand at your trade. Since you're doing so good at mine." Furious at his own artistic impotence, Lee challenges Austin to put his money where his mouth is: "I'll bet you your car that you can't steal a toaster without gettin' busted."

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And in the next scene, Shepard reveals their relationship in its most ridiculous light. A frustrated Lee is furiously burning his script and methodically using the golf clubs he won from Kimmer to smash the typewriter, while a drunken Austin is carefully stuffing slices of bread into the countless toasters he has stolen from houses in the nearby desert developments. Starting from pure kitchen-sink naturalism (two brothers, literally in a kitchen, airing old grievances), Shepard has moved through eight simultaneously hilarious and horrifying scenes to arrive at this wacky sight, and it is difficult to convey in brief the relentless, ridiculous logic by which he has fashioned this absurdist spectacle out of the raw material of the mundane. You really have to see, and hear, it to believe it.

But Shepard is not content to stop there. Early on, Austin had complained that he, not Lee, really knows about life. "He's been camped out on the desert for three months. Talking to cactus," he tells Kimmer. "What's he know about what people wanna' see on the screen! I drive on the freeway every day. I swallow the smog. I watch the news in color. I shop in the Safeway. I'm the one who's in touch! Not him!" And in the last act, Lee seems willing to concede, and to return to the desert: "What I need is somethin' authentic. Somethin' to keep me in touch. It's easy to get outa' touch out there." But by this time, Austin has become more concerned with the deal than with truth; when Lee starts to leave, an enraged Austin tries to stop him by strangling him. Finally the curtain falls on the two brothers squared off in mortal combat—art versus commerce, truth versus artifice, nature versus civilization. Though their conflict is a bit schematic throughout, not just at the end, it is a mark of the depth of Shepard's understanding of the chaos of our culture that we are as confused as the characters are about which brother represents which values; popular culture has made the True West inaccessible even to its inhabitants.

Unfortunately, I attended a performance in which Lee was played not by John Malkovich, who has attracted so much praise, but by his understudy, Bruce Lyons. Still, there is one advantage to watching an understudy (apart from the chance to discover a new talent): it allows you to separate clearly the part from the performer, if only because an understudy is often inadequate to the demands of the role. And it is obvious that Lee is simply a terrific character for any actor to play. Outfitted in a filthy T-shirt, baggy pants, and a soiled raincoat, picking his nose, scratching his crotch, and alternately wheedling and threatening, he is a nightmare of bad smells, bad taste, bad manners, and the potential for bad acts. Though Lyons looks too young (Lee is supposed to be in his early forties, ten years older than Austin), he does a credible job of combining surface menace and fundamental cowardice. Gary Sinise has more problems conveying Austin's superficial weakness and basic resolve. With his prissy exasperation and nervous sputtering, he

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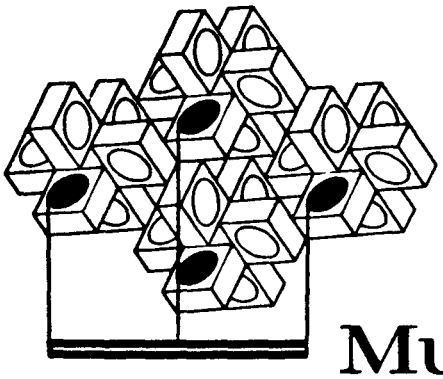

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comes across as an unpleasant blend of Woody Allen and Richard Dreyfuss, nasal in voice and awkward in gesture. It is hard to believe that his Austin and Lyons' Lee are even remotely related, much less brothers. Sinise is such a consummate wimp that the violent climax is unbelievable.

Still, Sinise deserves some credit in his role as director of this production at the Cherry Lane Theatre and as artistic director of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, which revived the play. Originally produced two years ago in New York by Joseph Papp for the Public Theatre (after its premiere at the Magic Theater in San Francisco), *True West* folded after a very short, very controversial run in which Shepard, Papp, and the director, Robert Woodruff, all denounced one another, while the critics pounced on the actors, Tommy Lee Jones (Austin) and Peter Boyle (Lee). Now, thanks to Sinise, *True West,* though not Shepard's best work, has at least been given the fair chance it deserved in New York.

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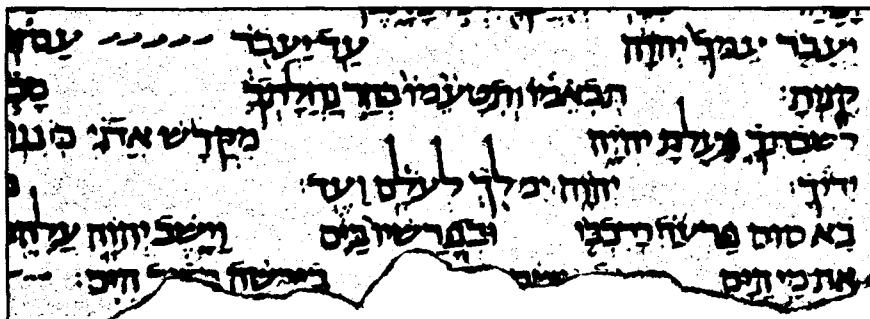

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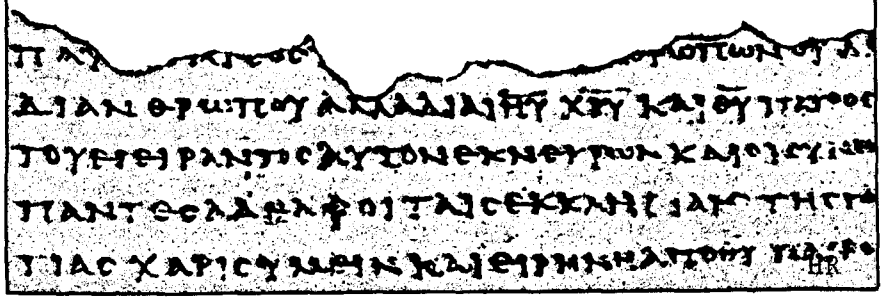

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Success Without Labels

THE INVITATION TO TWYLA THARP'S NOVEMBER BENEFIT at the Rainbow Room came in a swanky lilac envelope, with silver-deco typography and artwork, and more trendy names on it than a month of gossip columns. Minimum donation for this posh evening was $500. By now Tharp brandishes the implements of chic with such confidence that half the people think she's putting them on and half the people think it's her biggest talent. Tharp's success lies precisely at the intersection of art and entertainment, a place American dancers have been playing with like a sore tooth for most of their history.

The long, anxious debate between serious and popular art was already in full cry by the time the modern dance had left the egg. Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham and Charles Weidman had trooped through many a vaudeville stage with the Denishawn Dancers, had impersonated every kind of exotic that entered the florid minds of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, and had gone as far as they could with Miss Ruth's admonition that you may have to do it as Business but you must always think of it as Art. By the mid-1930s, before they had passed their first decade as independent choreographers, Humphrey and Graham had decided that commercial work would always mean making intolerable compromises, and they gave it up for good, even though it would have increased their audiences and their chronically feeble finances. Their renunciations established a frontier that subsequent ballet and modern dancers approached with much soul-searching.

Twyla Tharp's relationship to pop is unique in several ways—not the least of which is that she seems to have no hesitation about using any avenue to reach the public. She sees the entertainment media not as a threat but as a lifesaver. Pop is in her blood, the way it is in everyone's. Tharp simply doesn't think she has to adopt more elevated languages just because she's trying to do serious work. This, of course, has invited sniffs of indignation from the lions who guard the portals of culture.

Two years ago she affronted the University of California at Berkeley by choosing to have her company perform at Bill Graham's downtown San Francisco rock house, the Warfield Theater, instead of at UC's Zellerbach Auditorium, the established home—the ghetto, in Tharp's view—of all the highbrow visiting dance companies in the Bay Area. She forsook what she thought of as a suburban, museum-oriented audience for what she hoped would be a greater cross section of the population. Zellerbach hasn't forgiven

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her yet. Neither has the city's establishment *San Francisco Chronicle*. When she returned to the Warfield last October, the paper kissed her off as "a talent in the process of degeneration."

It's easy to see Tharp's dances as pop forms, rather than as manipulations of pop forms. Once you make this mistake, you could conclude that she's repeating herself or making simple parodies. But if you look at her work carefully, you see that she sidesteps cliché at the very points where you'd expect her to be depending on it. *Nine Sinatra Songs*, one of two new dances her company presented on the fall West Coast tour, is a perfect example of her ability to be completely entertaining while pushing into new choreographic terrain.

There's hardly a more familiar image in American folklore than the dancing couple in tuxedo and ball gown, and Tharp's seven dancing couples exude the romance and sophistication we expect. But the creation of this mood—which is where the genre usually stops—is only a starting point for Tharp. There's an interesting tension in her basic premise: Frank Sinatra is not associated with any of the creators of our idealized ballroom couple—the Castles, the Murrays, Astaire and Rogers. The records Tharp has chosen are all of late-Sinatra vintage, the sixties mostly, when he'd become king of the swingers, a sort of institutionalized love-guru. No longer the skinny, tense, tremulous crooner of his youth, he'd seen and done it all, and was ready for more. Backed up by the lush Nelson Riddle sound, created for him, his mature songs are knowing, tinged with a blasé regret—a calculated play for the nostalgia trade, but not at all consonant with the sparkly, romping romanticism of Fred and Ginger.

This discrepancy is the initial tip-off that Tharp isn't going to let designer Oscar de la Renta do all the dazzle or Sinatra lull us into memory lane. Instead she creates seven duets and two ensemble dances in which the basic ingredients get shifted around so that seven completely different relationships emerge—all of them elegant, witty and virtuosic, especially in intricately timed lifts.

Preserving the rhythms and the flavor of the songs, she resorts to few literal devices. In "Strangers in the Night," guest artist Gary Chryst and Mary Ann Kellogg do a tango with almost no tango steps. What colors their dance is the sexiness of the tango—their gliding, tight-together partnerings, their almost decorative interlockings of fingers and hands, their mastery of the sinuous body line.

To "One for my Baby" John Carrafa, with jacket off and tie undone, and Sara Rudner, in a slinky black dress, dance a couple at cross-purposes. Befuddled by drink perhaps, or a week-old argument, they lock together, split, aim for synchrony and miss spectac-

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ularly. But they're neither fools nor clowns. They're wonderfully serious, awkward and daring at once.

In faintly old-fashioned costumes, Christine Uchida and Richard Colton do a romantic waltz ("I'm Not Afraid"), bringing the conventions of the airborne kiss, the heady meeting of the eyes, the decorous pleasure of hand on waist, just to the edge of banality but stopping on the lovable side of it. Shelley Washington and Keith Young are sweepingly grand; William Whitener and Jennifer Way have a lively, almost polka-ish bounce; Raymond Kurshals and Amy Spencer are intent but reserved; Shelley Freydont and Tom Rawe are hotly combative even when they embrace.

As an extra bonus, most of these portraits show the dancers cast against their usual types. Uchida, for instance, is the tough and cheerful daredevil of the company, and Carrafa is the angelic mischief-maker.

In the two group numbers, Sinatra sings "My Way" and all the couples continue to dance their way, swinging through the crowded space as if they had it all to themselves. Having shown us their individuality, Tharp can assemble them in a typical ballroom-ballet scene without fear that we'll forget who they are amid clouds of visual perfume.

Twyla Tharp is always working several ideas at one time, and her other new dance, *Bad Smells*, couldn't be more different from *Sinatra*. The sublime creatures who engaged in the civilized and expressive ritual of social dancing are now transformed into ragged, primal automatons. They writhe and clutch, grin and grimace for the benefit of a man holding a video camera (Tom Rawe), who dances among them filming their tortured gestures and unseeing faces. The picture he gets is fractured, bleached, purposely distorted, and is projected simultaneously on a large screen at the back of the stage. Glenn Branca's metallic rock music accompanies it all at murderous volume.

When she was starting to make this piece a year ago, after her raunchy, spectacular, full-length work *The Catherine Wheel*, Tharp told me in an interview that she was trying to make the ugliest movement possible. "People have been taught by our moralistic and puritan tradition that ugly is bad," she said. "Maybe it's just a force, a viable force. If we can confront it, it might not be so terrifying. It might be quite seductive, as are things that are generally forbidden. We're taking a look at all these items, the way primitive people do, with very strong forms—strong enough to stand up to those evil spirits." What's interesting to me about this statement is that Tharp doesn't promise that anything good or beautiful will result from the confrontation.

What does result, for me, is a horrifying insight into our culture. The public exploitation of private passion, the actors reduced to ci-

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phers before our eyes, while the TV image lures us, fascinates us, involves us and finally makes us its accomplice. You don't watch the choreography of *Bad Smells*; after two viewings in San Francisco I couldn't say much about the movement except that it seems to be made of tiny fragments from rock dancing, done with maximum impact and no give at all. Your eye flits from the dancers to the tracks and smudges they're making on the screen. A gigantic eye (whose?)—a mouth stretched in agony—bodies tromping in up-and-down zigzags, a ghastly shadow of a tribal dance. The figure of the cameraman stays between us and the dancers—with his back to the audience he displays nothing but the quick competence of his trade, sliding to the floor to focus on a prone body, glancing at the screen to see the effect he's getting, pulling back for a wide shot.

Certain events seem to happen in the dance. One woman (Kellogg) emerges as a sort of totem figure, whom the camera's eye distends and almost devours in its reverence. She dances with one of the men (Kurshals). He makes a series of odd, slow hand gestures, as if crossing himself. The goddess is left on the floor, and the camera sucks hungrily at her hair, her gaping mouth, as the lights go out.

Bad Smells is an allegory, a parable, a visceral experience that throbs long afterward with apocalyptic fright. Tharp conceived it as a dance by and for the video camera, and it was aired in that form on ARTS cable, as part of a documentary called "Twyla Tharp Scrapbook: 1965–1982." Tharp's works, however, have a way of spilling over into each other; hence, the staged version, which struck me as a more profound work. By the time it's performed in New York—probably this fall—Tharp will have completed a video version of *The Catherine Wheel* with computerized animation, directed the opera sequences for Milos Forman's movie of *Amadeus*, and collaborated on a big new dance for her company with composer Philip Glass. Can anyone escape her? Can anyone resist her?

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Notes on Contributors

LOUIS RENE BERES'* most recent books are *Apocalypse: Nuclear Catastrophe in World Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1980) and *Mimicking Sisyphus: America's Countervailing Nuclear Strategy* (Lexington Books, 1983). Cited recently by *The New York Times* as one of five scholars who "rally the disarmament movement," Mr. Beres is Professor of Political Science at Purdue University.

LOUIS SIMPSON has two books scheduled for publication this fall: *Physical Universe*, a collection of new poems, and *People Live Here*, selected poems. Mr. Simpson's work first appeared in this Review in 1952.

GUY DAVENPORT's most recent books are *Trois Caprices* (Pace Trust) and *The Resurrection in Cookham Churchyard*. He teaches at the University of Kentucky. His first *Hudson Review* publication was in 1956.

A. R. AMMONS' *Lake Effect Country* has just been published by W. W. Norton. His first poems to be published anywhere appeared in this Review in 1954.

ROGER ROSENBLATT* is a Senior Writer and essayist at *Time* magazine. A version of "Preparations for a Journey" will appear as the introductory chapter of a book, *Children of War*, to be published this summer by Anchor Press/Doubleday.

CHARLES TOMLINSON's most recent publications are *The Flood*, verse, and *Poetry and Metamorphosis*, the Clark lectures for 1982. His *Translations* will appear later this year. His poems first appeared in this Review in 1957.

T. R. HUMMER's* books include *Translation of Light* (Cedar Creek Press, 1976) and *The Angelic Orders* (Louisiana State University Press, 1982). His *The Passion of the Right-Angled Man* is forthcoming from University of Illinois Press.

GAIL MAZUR's* first book, *Nightfire*, was published by David R. Godine. Ms. Mazur is poetry editor of *Ploughshares*; she also teaches a poetry workshop at Lesley College and directs the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, Mass.

DANA GIOIA is a businessman-poet who lives in Bronxville, N.Y.

JOSEPH EPSTEIN, who teaches literature at Northwestern University, is Editor of *The American Scholar*. A new collection of his essays, *The Middle of My Tether*, will be published this summer by W. W. Norton.

MARVIN MUDRICK has written for this Review for thirty years; the piece in this issue is his eighty-ninth contribution. He is Provost of the College of Creative Studies and Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

SONYA RUDIKOFF is an Advisory Editor of this Review. Her work first appeared in these pages in 1950.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE's most recent book is *Acts and Letters of the Apostles*, translated from the Greek (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982). His *Continuing Conclusions: New Poems* is forthcoming from the Louisiana State University Press. His first *Hudson Review* appearance was in 1954.

THEODORE ZIOLKOWSKI* is Class of 1900 Professor of Comparative Literature and Dean of the Graduate School at Princeton University. This year Princeton University Press will publish his latest book, *Varieties of Literary Thematics*.

VERNON YOUNG's work first appeared in these pages in 1948. He has been writing on film for this Review since 1955.

ROBERT ASAHINA, *The Hudson Review*'s regular theater critic, is Arts Editor of *Harper's*.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL, *The Hudson Review*'s regular dance critic, is presently completing her book *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey*, for which she has been awarded a grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation. This summer she will travel to Israel to deliver a series of lectures on contemporary dance, sponsored by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

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